The Serpent in the Garden

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The Serpent in the Garden

by cactus_junkie

Summary

People like him are few and far in between. The ancient world used to revere those like Will; now, they are kept at arm's length, largely ignored by most, despised by many, and glorified by a small minority.

Will possesses magic. A Witch, born with abilities and power in his soul beyond even his own comprehension. He is not just any run of the mill, backwater medium with a beat-up tarot deck and a muggy crystal ball. No, Will Graham is a Necromancer. More powerful than any who have come before him.

Jack sees Will for what he is; a tool to communicate with the dead and solve murder cases. Will doesn't know what to see himself as anymore - all he knows is that the line between the living and the dead seems to erode day by day the longer he spends lending his abilities to the FBI.

And when a certain Hannibal Lecter, Professor of Occult and Magic Studies, is consulted to help on Jack's current case, for the first time in his life the Dead become the least of Will's worries.

Notes

Genesis 4:7
But if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must rule over it.

One

Jack's eyes swept over the crowd as bodies milled through the doors of the arrivals section of the Louis Armstrong New Orleans International Airport. He held no name card like many of the cab drivers around him, eyes bored and wandering.

His spine was ramrod straight, arms crossed over his chest, pulse throbbing in his throat. Time was running away from him. From the whole *situation* he and his team were currently in.

Finally, he spotted his target and Jack's shoulders slumped with relief.

"Professor!" he called out, striding forwards.

Said Professor smiled in that charming, captivating way of his as he watched Special Agent Jack Crawford approach. They exchanged a warm, firm handshake before Jack was all but seizing the other man dragging him from the airport.

"Forgive me, Jack, but I did not realise we would be in such a rush."

"Another body dropped whilst you were in the air. This is our freshest kill yet, Professor Lecter. We need to hurry."

Professor Hannibal Lecter merely smiled at Jack again as Jack made a beeline for his ridiculously large, blacked out Cadillac SUV amidst the sea of other vehicles in the parking lot. Jack helped Hannibal secure his luggage in the trunk and then was clambering into the driver's seat, leaving Hannibal blinking underneath the scorching summer sun above them. Hannibal adjusted the knot of his tie and then slid into the passenger side with a soft sigh.

"I hadn't realised I would be seeing a crime scene the minute I set foot in Louisiana," Hannibal mused, secretly entertained by the way Jack peeled out of the parking lot and onto the highway.

"None of us did," Jack replied grimly. "At first we thought our perp was following some sort of cycle, dropping bodies around the phases of the moon, following the alignment of stars or something of that kind. But our team has been picking apart everything known about astronomy, lunar witchcraft, and there's nothing. They're killing at random."

"What's changed?"

"Whoever is doing this, so far they've only killed in the middle of the night. Will's always been able to pinpoint time of death from anywhere between midnight and 3:33 in the morning. But this body dropped two hours ago."

Hannibal's brows rose. "Only 2 hours ago? Surely the killer was still close within the vicinity of the murder scene then?"

“You’d think so, but there’s not a trace of them. We’ve got officers on patrol and searching but it’s like they vanished into thin air. I’m starting to wonder if they actually have that ability - that we’re going after a full blooded witch here, and not some crazed wannabe.”

Hannibal observed the clench of Jack’s hands on the steering wheel as he drove like a madman through the New Orleans traffic. “I’m afraid to tell you no known instances of such an ability have ever been recorded, Jack.”

“Huh?”

“Vanishing into thin air. It’s not a power witches are known to possess.”

“Right,” Jack grunted, “well, that’s why I’m glad you agreed to come out and help on this case, Professor. We need all the expertise we can get on this case, because whoever’s doing this is into some *dark* magic. You’ll see what I mean when we get to the case.”

Then, Jack glanced warily at the other man.

“I hope you’re not squeamish, Professor Lecter. This killer has a penchant for… well, let’s just say all the scenes so far have been extravagant.”

Hannibal smiled smoothly, eyes flickering between the road in front of them and Jack’s side profile. “Oh, don’t worry about me. I’ve seen plenty of disturbing things in my time - there’s no choice but to see these things sometimes, with the nature of my work and my research.”

Jack just nodded grimly, lips pressed together and eyes on the road. “I uh, ought to give you a heads up about Will, by the way.”

Cocking his head to the side in interest, Hannibal waited for Jack to explain. He watched the agent’s throat bob, saw him searching desperately for the words in his mind.

“What is it, Jack? I know I’ve yet to meet Will, so please do tell me.”

Jack sighed in frustration, taking the next exit as they neared their destination a little more. “Well… it’s just that Will isn’t known for being… how do I put it?”

“Will’s abilities are renowned, Jack. Globally, I might add. There is no one who can do what he does, and do it so well. No one has even come close to being able to demonstrate the same level of skill he has. I met one, many years ago, in a desolate little village buried in snow in rural Siberia whilst on a research trip, but that witch’s abilities pale in comparison to what Will is reported to be capable of.”

“It’s not Will’s abilities that are the problem, Professor,” Jack replied, shaking his head in a defeated manner. “It’s his demeanour. His methods. His damn manners, if I’m being brutally honest. He also has a way of doing things that the FBI aren’t exactly keen on.”

“Oh?”

“If it got out to the public that we were working with a witch who does the things that Will does - it would *not* go down well. The powers that be only allow my unit to consult him

because he gets results - because of *what* he can do. They just don't approve of *how* he does it."

Hannibal frowned. "And what is so terrible about his methods?"

"Public trust and perception in witches is in the trenches as it is for the common man. The public is supposed to have faith in us. If anyone ever found out how Will works, we'd be accused of working with the Devil. And I wouldn't blame them - the first time I saw him use his magic, I thought it was down right Satanic. People would think he's just as bad as the murderer we're currently trying to catch."

"Magic is all about intention. Will is using his abilities to help catch a killer."

"That's the issue; management argues that if he can think like our killer, use the same kind of dark magic as our killer… should we trust Will?"

Hannibal mulled it over, observing the now very bland, suburban street they were speeding down. "What do you think? Do you worry that Will may start using his magic in the same way as the killer you are hunting?"

The car came to a screeching stop and Jack looked like he was bracing himself already. "I try not to think too much anymore, Professor. I just hope."

The house was a cookie-cutter structure like the rest of the buildings around it. Identical. Apart from the ribbons of police tape, officers, forensics in hazmat suits and police cars surrounding it. Otherwise it was totally normal. *Boring* , even.

Hannibal and Jack had taken perhaps three steps up the front path towards the closed front door, the officers on duty around the police tape nodding to them, when all hell broke loose.

The front door was wrenched open, the sound of blood-curdling screams bursting into the air. From the shadows, a woman emerged, staggering and stumbling forwards. Except, it wasn't just a woman. It was their victim.

Her head lolled every which way, as if she couldn't support the weight of it, mouth agape and screaming. She was utterly nude, her pale skin streaked in her own blood and her blonde hair matted with the substance. Her eyes hung from their sockets, still attached to her optic nerves. From the dip in between her collar bones to her pubic bone, her flesh had been ruthlessly carved into. Whoever their killer was, they had sliced a magic circle used for evocation into her body - circles within circles, segmented by the lines of a six pointed star, runes and symbols gouged into her skin at the intersections.

Hannibal admired the accuracy of such a complex circle, no doubt created whilst their victim had still been breathing.

"Francesca!"

Bursting from the shadows behind her, emerged none other than Will Graham.

Will Graham, who looked as if he'd been clawed and mauled by a jungle cat, covered in blood, chest heaving and eyes the colour of night just before lightning struck. No pupil, no iris, no white sclera. Just darkness. He was glorious. His shirt was also in tattered ribbons, revealing more bloodied skin that bore what looked like sprawling black tattoos of runes and symbols on his flesh.

Swaying on her feet was their victim - Francesca - who staggered further down the path. Will closed his eyes and took a deep, shuddering breath, before opening them again and hissing something low under his breath in a language that Jack didn't recognise but made Hannibal's spine stiffen at the sound of it.

Francesca suddenly froze, her open mouth going slack as the gurgling screams in her throat stopped. Ever so slowly, inch by inch, she began to sink to the floor. Hannibal watched in amazement as Will carried out the exact same movements behind her - and then he realised Francesca's body was mirroring Will, copying the way he slowly sank to his knees.

Will's eyes slipped shut, and then, like a puppet whose strings had been cut, both he and the body of Francesca collapsed to the floor with a thud - in Francesca's case, the thud was followed by a sickening squelch.

Time seemed frozen. The throngs of people surrounding the crime scene all stared in horror at what had just happened in front of them. Hannibal noticed one officer turn abruptly and vomit onto the sidewalk before the front lawn, and then all of a sudden bodies were rushing everywhere. Forensics scurrying to the body of Francesca, officers scrambling to assist them, Jack barrelling through them all to reach Will.

Will, who lay unconscious on the path, chest slowly rising. Hannibal's eyes swept over him, noticing the deep bleeding wound on the palm of Will's hand. He strode after Jack, wincing as the burly man went to grab the witch.

"Jack," he murmured, low and authoritative. "Please, be gentle with him."

Jack whirled on him. "Do you know what that was? Do you recognise what he was doing?"

Hannibal crouched down beside Will, beckoning over an EMT who came rushing with a shock blanket and a medical bag.

"He took control of her. Sent her back to wherever it was he found her," Hannibal explained, shuffling back to allow the EMT to examine Will.

"Christ," Jack muttered under his breath. "You mean he essentially killed her again?"

Hannibal's lips twitched. "She was not alive, Jack. She was merely re-animated, not truly resurrected. Neither her consciousness nor her soul were there."

"I don't understand," Jack gritted out.

Hannibal restrained a sigh. "You've heard of how sometimes when a chicken's head is chopped off, its body will still run about and its wings will still flap. That is essentially what

we just witnessed with Francesca."

"But her consciousness wasn't there, you just said - how could she have just gotten up and walked?" Jack demanded.

Hannibal was largely aware that Jack had paid very little attention to the unconscious witch at their feet as the EMT checked Will's vitals and then began to bandage the wound on his palm.

"I imagine it was to do with the balance of energy transfer, and the fact Francesca is so recently deceased. Will would be able to explain exactly what happened seeing as he was the one who re-animated her - speaking of which, Jack, you don't seem awfully concerned that Will is in such a state."

Jack glanced down at Will and grunted. "Oh, I'm not being careless, Professor, he'll be fine in a minute. We're just used to it now. It's not the first time Graham's passed out after using his magic."

Just as Hannibal was about to reply, a guttural, bone shuddering breath wrenched from Will's mouth, his eyes flying open as his back bowed upwards in an arch off the floor. He spluttered, coughed, rolled to his side and then groaned, shoving the EMT away with a flap of his hand.

"Motherfucker," Will wheezed in a rasping voice. "That one was rough."

Jack suddenly leaned forwards and seized Will by the wrist, hauling him up. "Come on. We need you back at the lab for testing and the post-mortem. This is Professor Hannibal Lecter, by the way."

Will's dazed eyes landed on Hannibal, his pupils so wide they nearly engulfed his iris. His lip curled in what Hannibal could only describe as disdain as the witch assessed him.

"So you're the academic Jack's been rambling on about for the last few weeks," Will sneered, ignoring the hand Hannibal held out to shake.

"It's a pleasure to meet you, Will," Hannibal smiled nonetheless, dropping his hand back to his side. "I'm very much looking forward to working with you."

Will suddenly stepped very close - too close, for Jack's liking - to Hannibal and looked up at him with a vicious glint in his eyes.

"Listen, *Professor* ," Will began, all but stabbing a finger at the older man, "you're here because Jack wants you. Let's just make it clear now that I want nothing to do with you - your kind is good for one thing only, and that's sticking your damn nose in where it doesn't belong. You think you know magic. You think you can help catch this killer. I think you don't even have the first *clue* about magic, and I think you're going to be nothing but a hindrance. So stay out of my way, you understand?"

Before Hannibal could open his mouth to respond, Will had turned and was marching towards Jack's SUV. Hannibal turned to Jack with raised brows - the agent simply shrugged.

"I did warn you on the drive over here about his… demeanour," Jack sighed, fishing his keys out of his pocket and following Will to the SUV. "Come on. Let's get out of here."

Just as Jack and Hannibal were approaching the vehicle, a man with mousy hair and a short stature trotted out of the house and up the path towards Jack's car, stopping at the police tape marking the boundaries of the property.

"Will, wait!"

Will stiffly turned from where he was climbing into the back of Jack's car. "What, Jimmy?"

"Do you want me to scoop up your salt and bring it back to the lab?"

Will shut his eyes, dragging a bloodied palm over his face, as if asking some higher power for strength. "No. No, I do not want my salt back. How many times do I have to explain this to you?"

"Sure thing - see you later!"

Hannibal watched in amusement as Jimmy retreated back into the house, snapping on a pair of disposable gloves. Jack slapped a hand impatiently on the side of the car from where his arm hung down from the open window.

"Professor, you coming?"

Hannibal slipped back inside the vehicle with a suppressed smile when he heard Will's muttered *'does he have to?'* from the back seat. "Of course."

Jack sighed heavily as they pulled away from the crime scene. "I can't begin to tell you how grateful I am that you agreed to consult on this case, Professor. I really can't."

"It's my pleasure," Hannibal assured him, voice silken and soothing.

He glanced up into the rear-view mirror and caught Will's murderous gaze. Hannibal was beginning to think he was going to be just as grateful as Jack that he'd agreed to consult on the case too.

Two

Chapter Notes

Psalm 71:4
Rescue me, O my God, from the hand of the wicked,
from the grasp of the unjust and cruel man

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The bright lights of the lab affronted Will's senses the moment they stepped inside. He'd always detested how artificial everything was - the acrid smell of chemicals, the fluorescent lights, the gleam of the table the bodies laid upon. Even the pristine white of the lab coats set his teeth on edge.

Whilst they'd waited for Francesca's body to be delivered to the lab, Jack had allowed Will a few sparse moments to go and wash up the best he could in the men's restroom. He'd discarded his shirt into an evidence bag which hung from him in tatters, begrudgingly accepting an old scrubs shirt in favour of skulking about the lab topless. He scrubbed at the blood that seemed to cling to every available surface on his body, wetting paper towels and wiping at his arms and neck and face until they were as clean as they were going to be.

Will wouldn't have minded as much, if it had been his own blood. But in the craze of realising Francesca's body had re-animated so suddenly and had begun clawing at Will before staggering out of the front door, he'd ended up covered in her blood after she'd thrown herself at him - and then he'd quite promptly skidded and fallen face first in the slippery pools of blood she'd left behind in his haste to run after her.

Not his finest moment.

"Alright then," Zeller began, snapping on his gloves. "Let's start, shall we?"

Will hung back, lingering next to the wall of cabinets that bodies were stored in. They were all currently empty thankfully, his senses confirming it without having to look inside.

The dead did love to whisper in his presence.

He zoned out as the team worked over the body, taking samples and swabs and photographs. Francesca was quiet now, her energy like a cold flat stone and her soul undoubtedly making its way through the Netherworld. Will couldn't help but dissociate at times like this; he had to, for the sake of his own mind. Communicating with the dead was no more draining on him than communicating with the living - which was difficult on most days, if he was honest - but the reality of having to see the body laid out like a slab of meat, poked and prodded and analysed after he'd just spoken to them always hit hard.

And she'd been so scared. So, so scared.

"..ill? Will?"

Will's head jolted up and he blinked, looking at Jack and finding the man watching him expectantly.

"You with us?" Jack asked, tone severe. "Professor Lecter said this symbol carved into her is an evocation magic circle. Do you recognise it?"

Will blatantly ignored Professor Lecter and shuffled forwards, arms crossed over his chest. "It is. And I do recognise *some* of it."

Jack looked defeated and then turned to Hannibal with a hopeful expression. "You've read the report files I sent to you when you agreed to consult with us. You've seen the previous markings our killer has used - what do you make of these?"

Hannibal briefly glanced at Will, and the tense set of his jaw, aware he didn't want to tread on the witch's toes. "Whilst it's certainly not the same as the other markings the killer has left on the bodies on the case reports I've read, it bears similarities. The killer's intentions are the same."

"Well what are they trying to evoke?" Bev asked, frowning. "The devil himself? A demon? The ghost of their dead cat?"

"They're trying to summon anyone who will answer," Will muttered, eyes sweeping over the markings. "They've changed the runes and symbols each time they've killed, calling out to different entities."

Jimmy pursed his lips. "And who wouldn't want such a generous offering? Doesn't really seem to make sense for a demon to not be pleased by such a momentous sacrifice."

"Maybe they're picky eaters," Zeller suggested. "Which means our killer is only going to keep upping their game until someone is finally pleased enough with the offering."

"What did she say to you, Will?" Jack cut in, glaring at Zeller. "Did you get anything useful out of her?"

Will swallowed. "She didn't know him, never met him before in her life. The first thing he did was take her eyes out - she didn't get a proper chance to look at him before he began."

"Perfect," Jack muttered. "Well, at least we know we're looking for a man now."

"Not necessarily," Will disagreed, pressing his lips into a thin line and shaking his head.

"What do you mean?" Zeller asked. "She told you it was a man."

"This could be more than one person," Will replied. "A cult. A group of people who took their Ouija Board night a little too far and fell down the demon summoning rabbit hole."

Jimmy paled. “How likely is it that that’s what’s happening here?”

Will shrugged. “Just as likely that it’s one individual. Why don’t you ask Professor Lecter? He’s the expert here, isn’t he?”

Will’s not-so-subtle glower did not go unmissed by Hannibal, who ignored it out of good will.

“It could be a cult, as Will said. We have no way of knowing if this is someone acting alone. Unless the other victims you communicated with reported differently?” Hannibal asked, shooting the focus back on to Will.

Will glared. “Up until now, whoever is doing this has been striking at night. All the other victims have said all they remember is a shadowy figure pinning them down and taking their eyes before they could see them properly. It *could* just be one guy. Or it could be a rotation of different people all working under the common goal of summoning whatever they can.”

“Do you think there’s a chance they arrive as a group and then one of them kills the victim whilst they stand around and watch? Or do they take turns and go solo?” Bev asked, tilting her head as she looked at Francesca’s body.

“The more people there are at the crime scene, the harder that becomes to cover up multiple sets of DNA being left behind,” Jimmy pointed out.

“Or it makes it harder to catch them,” Zeller argued. “So far there hasn’t been a shred of DNA evidence, but if we start finding a bucket load of different DNA samples, how do we narrow it down to who the killer is? The proverbial needle in a haystack.”

“Surely such a large group would draw suspicion, breaking and entering homes?” Jack pointed out.

“And we’re full circle again,” Bev sighed. “Was there anything different about Francesca to the other victims when you communicated with her, Will?”

“The fact she was so recently dead, so easily re-animated… the killer is taunting us. Killing in broad daylight, leaving such a fresh kill. They’re escalating,” Will muttered. “She told me that he nailed her palms and her feet to the floor before he started cutting the circle into her, to keep her in place.”

“Well duh, I could have told you that,” Zeller grumbled, gesturing to the wounds on her palms and feet where nails had been hammered through.

“Except none of the other victims have ever been given a stigmata before,” Will snapped back at him. “Their throats are always slit before the killer carves the evocation circle into them.”

Hannibal tssk’ed, shaking his head. “No wonder they have had no luck in summoning any sort of demon.”

Jack frowned. “What do you mean?”

“These runes and symbols you see on the body,” Hannibal began, pointing at Francesca’s torso, “they’re powerful. The killer has clearly been preparing for a long time for this, studying. But where they’re going wrong is that they’re killing their victims *before* carving these magic circles into them. The offering of blood, of their life force, needs to be given *after* the circle has been drawn.”

Everyone’s eyes narrowed in on the gaping gash on Francesca’s throat.

“So he got the order of the summoning wrong. Circle first, slit throat second,” Jimmy mused.

“Why aren’t they drawing the circles on the floor or the wall? Why are they always carving into the flesh?” Zeller sighed, eyes fixed on the circle sliced into Francesca.

“They probably believe it’s a more effective way of ensuring a successful evocation,” Will answered, rubbing at his eyes tiredly. “Creating the summoning circle directly into flesh is a more direct route to whoever they’re trying to summon.”

“And does it work? *Has* it worked this time?” Jack asked, brow creasing.

Will went a little pale. “I… there was something off about the whole thing.”

Zeller snorted. “You think?”

“I *mean* ,” Will snapped at him, “that this kill is different. There was something… something was *there* when I summoned Francesca’s soul.”

“But you can’t say for definite what it was?” Jack pressed. “Because I need to know what it means if our killer successfully summoned something evil, Will. Does it mean that they’re done killing? Does it mean *we’re* all cursed? Did something get *out* ?”

Will looked defeated. “I need to go deeper.”

“Meaning what, exactly?”

“I’ll need to spend longer with Francesca’s body. I’ll need to potentially… go. Go to her myself.”

“You’re not making any sense,” Jack gritted out. “What do you mean, *go* ?”

Will tipped his head back, eyes closed, and released a long heavy sigh. “I’ll need to die for a little bit, Jack.”

The sight of the old, weathered white house at the end of the half mile long winding driveway brought instant relief to Will as he returned home. It stood nestled between clusters of cypress trees, their branches softly caressing each other as the wind made them sway.

His home had once been an old plantation. Will had let the land around it return to nature, knowing full well he didn’t have the time to singlehandedly maintain the sprawling grounds. He did, however, keep the driveway in the best shape he could - it wouldn’t do to let the one

road in and one road out become overgrown and impossible to traverse down without a hatchet and some pruning shears.

At the back of the house was a sloped garden that led down to his own little section of the Mississippi River. It was shadowed by thickets of tupelo and cypress trees, the surface of the water covered in duckweed. There was a small jetty that was clinging on for dear life, near dilapidated - Will always meant to get around to fixing it but never did. One day it would probably just rot into the water.

At night, sometimes Will would sit at the edge of the bank of the river and watch the glowing eyes of the alligators in the dark. It brought him a strange kind of calm when he couldn't sleep.

For the last twenty-two years, since he'd been sixteen, the French Colonial had been his personal haven. Nobody bothered him here, and he could go about his life in relative peace. Sure, there were the odd lunatics every now and then who hammered crucifixes into the ground at the top of his driveway - they were never brave enough to go all the way down to the house - and stood in small groups reciting passages from the Bible at him until he eventually grew tired of the mob's noise and wandered down to disperse them.

Last time that had happened, he'd brought his own Bible with him and started drawling verses back at them.

The problem was, even though he lived in virtual isolation, with no neighbours on either side of him for miles, Will was never truly alone. Not as he wished to be. The dead were everywhere, and they were demanding. Greedy for attention. Hungry for someone to listen, to notice. On his good days, Will could tune them out. He could mute the whispers, the groaning pleas, and some days life was *quiet* .

But then there were days like today, when he'd come home from working with Jack, and the noise was unbearable. Sitting before a corpse whilst he called on their soul to come and talk with him opened the floodgates he worked very hard to keep shut. It took hours, days sometimes, to tamp down on the path he opened up between himself and the dead when he worked with Jack and his team. He didn't let the FBI know this, of course - he let them know and see very little - but Will would be lying to himself if he didn't admit that this work was draining him.

He knew it was an especially bad day when he started *seeing* the dead, as well as hearing them.

And the last thing he really needed right now, was to see *her* , standing at the top of the stairs as soon as he opened the front door.

"What do you want?"

Hannibal immediately smiled at the barbed greeting he received from the witch. "Good morning to you too, Will."

Will leant back on the creaky chair he sat on, fixing the older man before him with a filthy look. “Keep being nice. It’s not going to get you anywhere.”

Hannibal took an uninvited seat opposite Will at the table and gazed around at their surroundings. Jack and his team had been flown in from Washington Headquarters to New Orleans to work specifically on this case, setting up base in the FBI’s field office in the city. They’d been working on this case for months with no breakthrough, until Jack had finally persuaded the board to consult a certain witch who was rumoured to be a Necromancer with powers unheard of.

Most witches dealt with elemental magic. Potions and remedies, fortune telling, blessings and wards. Some were able to heal. Some even had the ability to reverse blights on crops, to change the weather, to grant wishes. But it was virtually unheard of for a witch to be a Necromancer.

Over hundreds of years, the practice had been outlawed and eradicated, those who were born with the gift put to death when it was discovered they were witches who wielded black magic. Laws and jurisdictions banned the practice of black magic, locking away those who were suspected of being able to bring back the dead. The world did not trust those who could bring back the dead, because it was not the only thing that could also be allowed passage back into the world of the living.

Demons and malevolent spirits were known to piggyback on the souls of those who were summoned back by Necromancers, and thousands of years of history recounted cases of witches purposefully opening up the gateway from Hell for demons to roam free.

Hannibal could understand why the FBI was hesitant to work with Will. Whilst his magic meant he was no longer going to be put to death or locked away, thanks to the lifting of previous laws, he was undoubtedly dangerous.

Because this sullen, blue-eyed, disgruntled looking man who clearly did not know he looked like an angel carved by Michelangelo himself, had the ability to unleash Hell on the world.

And Hannibal only found him all the more beautiful for it.

Will was clearly unaware of how captivating he was. Every curl on his head shone underneath the artificial lights above them, framing his face in lustrous waves. His eyes were pools that Hannibal wanted to fall into, to drink from and never leave. The clean line of his sharp jaw, dusted with light stubble, was begging for Hannibal to rake his teeth over it.

And his skin? Hannibal unashamedly wanted to drag his tongue over every single one of those black runes tattooed into his flesh.

Will was covered in markings. Around the circle of his throat at the base, there was a snake eating its own tail, an Ouroboros. The collar of his shirt hid the other markings he bore, but Hannibal had feasted his eyes yesterday at the crime scene when Will’s shirt had hung from him in ribbons after Francesca’s re-animated corpse had clawed at him. Today, however, all that was visible were the small runes on Will’s fingers and the two large, unnervingly realistic eyes tattooed into the palms of his hands.

Hannibal wondered if the soles of his feet matched.

“Got your eyeful yet?” Will snapped at him, despite the fact he hadn’t looked up at Hannibal once since the other man had sat down. His head remained buried in the book he was reading.

Hannibal had found Will alone in the office Jack had let him use for the duration of the investigation, the wall covered in notes, photographs, torn papers. Will had been crouched over the table reading what looked like a very old Grimoire.

“Forgive me,” Hannibal apologised. “Your tattoos interest me.”

Will grunted a non-committal sound in response.

“What made you decide to collect so many?” Hannibal enquired, eyes fixed on the way the body of the snake undulated with the bob of Will’s throat as he swallowed.

“None of your business,” Will muttered, still not looking up from the book. “You still didn’t answer my question; what do you want?”

Hannibal blinked, slowly. “To help you.”

Will’s head finally snapped up. “I told you yesterday when we met; I do not need your help. I don’t want you anywhere near me.”

“I may be of some use, Will.”

“In what way?” Will sneered, looking back down at the page he was on. “You’re here for your own gains, sniffing around these murders for something new to write another paper on and publish it in some bullshit journal that will applaud you and herald you as a pioneer amongst your peers. A true, world renowned expert in his field.”

“I fail to see where and when I have given that impression, considering you have only known me for twenty-four hours. I assure you, I’m not here for personal gain.”

“Academics are never altruistic,” Will mocked him. “Don’t bullshit me, Professor.”

Hannibal tilted his head, smiling. “Please, call me Hannibal.”

Will looked up again from the book, his face stony. “Oh, I see.”

Hannibal quirked a brow, reaching for the flask of coffee he’d placed on the table when he arrived. “And what do you see, Will?”

“You couldn’t give two fucks about the murders or the demon summoning the killer has been trying. You want to write a paper on *me* ,” Will accused him. “Good luck. You’re not the first to try.”

“You would make for a most interesting case study,” Hannibal mused, sipping his coffee. “But no, Will. I am sincerely only here to help Jack, just like you are. And besides, I could

ask you the same question; why did you agree to consult with Jack? You've never worked with the FBI before."

"How would you know I haven't worked with them before? Keeping tabs on my comings and goings?" Will snorted, shaking his head.

"Despite the fact no one has ever managed to get an interview with you, as you are notoriously reclusive, those in my field do have a general grasp of your work."

"Do you realise how *creepy* that is? That an entire group of people, all over the world, all interested in magic, are aware of my life? Of what I get up to? That they make notes on my life?"

"One of the many burdens of being such a famous progeny, I imagine."

"I'm a little old to be a progeny now, Professor. I'm thirty-eight."

"You didn't answer *my* question; why did you agree to consult with Jack?"

Will clenched his jaw, carefully lifting the page of the book and turning it. "The unfortunate consequences of having a conscience, as much as I try my best to be detached from it. I said no, originally. But I'm the only one who could help, the only one who can talk so clearly to the dead. The guilt started to gnaw at me."

"No nibbles from your own altruism then?" Hannibal smirked, mouth quirking.

Will scoffed. "Hardly. As cruel as it may seem, I care very little that these people have died. I don't see death as the terrible thing the rest of the world does."

"No," Hannibal hummed, "how could you, when it is part of your blood? Part of who you are? I do wonder, however, whether you actually do care very much about the fact these people have been murdered."

"Five bodies in five months," Will sighed. "They all would have met their end either way, sooner or later. But no, I couldn't stand by the fact they were being *used* like this. Death magic, black magic… whatever this killer thinks it is they're doing, using human life for their own gains isn't right."

"Says who?" Hannibal asked. "Theoretically, of course. You'll forgive me for playing devil's advocate."

"I am not scared of demons or spirits or death, Professor Lecter. But the rest of the world is, and they have every right to be. This killer is upsetting the balance of taking too many lives and putting the general populace at risk. Yes, whatever minor spirits or doom harbouring demons they've unleashed can't possess and slaughter and haunt the entire global population, but my morals won't budge from the fact you have to maintain the equilibrium."

"And what would that equilibrium be, hm?"

Will shrugged. “Tale as old as time. Can’t have too much good, can’t have too much bad. It’s what all witches live by. Little droplets of imbalance here and there are rectifiable, but this killer is trying to bring forth *way* too many demons. And I sure as shit won’t be the one cleaning up after him, which is why I need to nip this in the bud now with Jack.”

“And what if the killer has been successful?” Hannibal asked. “What if they did manage to summon a demon when they murdered Francesca?”

Will shut the book with a dull, heavy, thud. “Then I need to go fishing and see if our rogue demon is biting.”

“And the bait?” Hannibal asked, eyes glinting as he raised his flask of coffee again.

“You’re looking at it,” Will griped, gesturing to himself as he stood. “We all know demons just can’t say no to a little bit of Necromancer blood.”

“So willing to give your blood to evil? Are you not scared of the repercussions?”

With a grim face, Will started making his way to the office door. “What’s the worst that could happen? Anyway, are you coming, or are you going to sit around all day bugging me with bullshit questions? I’ve got a séance to conduct in the lab.”

“I wouldn’t miss it for the world,” Hannibal smiled, fluidly rising and following Will out of the office.

Behind them, as the door shut, the Grimoire violently snapped open, an invisible wind striking through the pages to abruptly stop on a section that read in its ancient, near dead language: ‘ *Belial - Leader of the Sons of Darkness’* .

Chapter End Notes

Thank you so much to everyone who has left kudos and commented so far! I <3 you!

Evocation- the action of invoking a spirit or deity
Stigmata - in Catholicism, are bodily wounds, scars and pain which appear in locations corresponding to the crucifixion wounds of Jesus Christ
Ouroboros - a circular symbol that depicts a snake or dragon devouring its own tail and that is used to represent the eternal cycle of destruction and rebirth
Grimoire - a textbook of magic, typically including instructions on how to create magical objects like talismans and amulets, how to perform magical spells, charms, and divination, and how to summon or invoke supernatural entities such as angels, spirits, deities, and demons.

Three

Chapter Notes

Jeremiah 1:9-10
"Behold, I have put my words in your mouth.
See, I have set you this day over nations and over kingdoms,
to pluck up and to break down,
to destroy and to overthrow,
to build and to plant."

"I don't like this," Jimmy mumbled under his breath for the umpteenth time. "I don't like this at *all* ."

Will's eyes burned with an indignant flame. "Jimmy. If you're not going to shut up, you can leave."

Jimmy stuck his chin out in defiance. "This is blasphemy. Sacrilege."

Jimmy was not referring to anything Holy - although this post-mortem lab probably was akin to hallowed ground for the forensic investigator. These pristine white walls and shiny stainless steel tools were sacred to Jimmy, and Will was about to defile it.

By disrupting the order of strict hygiene and cleanliness such a place demanded.

"The door is just there if this is too much for you," Will snapped.

Jimmy did in fact close his mouth then, glowering at the witch who was currently on his hands and knees, carefully pouring salt into a wide circle on the floor around Francesca's body, who was wrapped in white fabric from the shoulders down.

"This goes against *every* health and safety rule," Jimmy couldn't help but blurt out as Will toed his shoes off outside of the salt circle.

Will merely widened his eyes and thrust a hand wordlessly at the door, as if he couldn't quite believe the other man was still blathering.

"It's alright Jimmy, it's not an easy thing to watch," Zeller grumbled. "God only knows what the papers would have to say about this if anyone knew we were conducting a fucking séance in the basement lab."

And, as if on cue, the door burst open to reveal Jack. He stormed through, slamming the door behind him, eyes wild and flitting between Hannibal, Bev, Jimmy and Zeller who stood on the far side of the room before landing on Will.

“What the hell is this?!” Jack seethed, throwing a pile of slightly crumpled up sheets of paper at Will on the floor, fresh from the printer.

“Hey!” Will snapped, flapping the papers away from the line of salt he had just meticulously poured out from a heavy, velvet purple sack he’d brought with him. “Careful!”

“Careful?! *Careful* ?! That’s rich coming from you, Graham! Look at what Freddie Lounds has written!” Jack snarled.

Will closed his eyes. “Not the energy I need right now, Jack.”

“I couldn’t give a damn about the energy! She saw you, saw Francesca! Watched her re–animated corpse walk straight out of that house and then witnessed you doing whatever the hell it was you did yesterday!”

“Pardon me for gaining control of the stray walking corpse, should I have just let her roam free throughout New Orleans?” Will retorted, rolling his eyes. “I have no control over what Freddie Lounds does. I can’t help the fact she was there.”

“But you *can* help the fact you re-animated this woman’s dead body! You can help the fact you made a dead woman go wandering into broad daylight for all to see!”

Will crossed his arms, sitting back on his heels. “I would just like to say that controlling what happens during my communication with the dead is not always straightforward. Accidents happen.”

“You nearly had this whole unit shut down,” Jack seethed. “Do you know how many calls and meetings I’ve been in all night and all morning, trying to get the heat off your back? They want you dragged out and locked up, Will!”

Will nudged a few stray grains of salt back into place. “Well, being a Necromancer isn’t an arrestable offence anymore.”

“We are *this* ” - Jack pinches his thumb and index finger close together - “Close from being shut down, sent back to Washington with a shit show waiting for us when we get back.”

Will shrugged. “You are. I’m not. Makes no difference to me.”

Jack gawped at him. “Are you serious? Is he *fucking* serious right now?”

Bev stepped forwards wearily. “Jack has a point. We need to start being more careful - what happened yesterday can’t happen again.”

“Perhaps I could help,” Hannibal offered smoothly, eyes casting over Will, who still sat in his salt circle next to the corpse.

Will’s eye roll was almost audible. “Oh, here we go.”

“Don’t,” Jack warned him, pointing a meaty finger at him. “Don’t you dare start.”

Hannibal cleared his throat. “I believe part of the issue is Will’s power. Not his lack of, I’d just like to point out. It’s more of an excess of power. When communicating with the dead, getting the balance of power right can be difficult, even for the most seasoned witch. Will needs something to help channel him, something to divert the excess energy through to avoid, shall we say, bringing the dead back *too* much. That way he can keep the interaction reduced to a simple summoning, rather than a full blown animation.”

Jack squinted whilst Will made a spluttered noise of pure offence.

“Think of it like a river,” Hannibal went on, “you dig the trenches of a new, smaller river for the water that is flowing too fast, too strong, in order to slow down the current. A diversion from the main body of water to provide relief.”

“How would it work?” Jack asked. “Will would simply… channel it into you? Like some sort of lightning rod?”

“Yes, essentially. And pull it back as and when he needs it.”

“Absolutely not,” Will interrupts them. “I’m not channelling *anything* into that interfering, meddling - ”

“You can,” Jack commands him, cutting him off. “And you will. No questions, no ifs, no buts. If Professor Lecter is saying it’s possible, and he’s comfortable with it, it’s happening. I am not having another situation like that on my hands again.”

“Just give the bitch a restraining order, arrest her for disturbing the investigation,” Will argued, pulling handfuls of pillar candles from his bag next to the sack of salt. “Look, you can even tell them Francesca was still alive. Tell them she was somehow still clinging on, ran out the house, and poof. Heart gave up. Dead. Nothing to do with witchcraft.”

“That *is* what we’re having to tell the press,” Jack growled. “That she was still somehow miraculously able to get up and run out the house before she died for real on that pathway.”

“Well then, what’s the issue? I won’t go too far next time, don’t worry. No more re-animations.”

“There won’t be a next time because Professor Lecter will be there to assist you,” Jack sniped back.

Will took a deep breath and shut his eyes, tampering down on the fire building in him. Hannibal could practically sense it bubbling beneath his skin. Oh, the witch had a *temper* alright.

“Jack,” Will began slowly. “We’ll talk later about this. Right now, I’m doing what you asked me, so please. Either get out or get on the other side of the room. You’re throwing me off, and this *won’t* go well if I’m not in the right headspace.”

“You got some damn nerve, Graham,” Jack muttered, but stomped to the other side of the room to stand by Bev.

Hannibal drifted closer to the salt circle. “Would you like any help?”

Will smiled at him, flatly, cruelly. “Other. Side. Of. The. Room.”

Hannibal held his hands up, retreating back to his original spot. Bev shot him an apologetic look, whilst Jack merely glowered as he watched Will work.

The witch was muttering things under his breath too low to catch, but the words didn’t sound English. He crawled on his hands and knees to eight even points of the salt circle, his bare feet pale in the harsh lights as he placed large blue candles at seven points of the circle before pulling a black pillar candle from the bag and setting it facing North on the circle.

“What’s he saying?” Zeller hissed. “I can’t understand him.”

“None of us can, Z,” Jimmy told him, giving him a withering look.

“It’s a form of Aramaic,” Hannibal informed them. “There are few who still know how to speak this version of it. It is incredibly old.”

“How does he know fucking ancient Aramaic?” Zeller scoffed lightly. “The guy looks like he hasn’t read a book since ninth grade.”

Will abruptly stops from where he is whispering over the black candle on his hands and knees, eyes shut, and stands. He whips around to face Zeller.

“This is your lost chance to close your mouth before I put a very long, very nasty and very frightening curse on you, Zeller. And I’m not talking losing your car keys or going prematurely bald; I will infest every dream with your worst nightmares, send illnesses after your loved ones, put - ”

“Alright! Alright, Will, we get it!” Bev cut him off, wide eyed and frantic. “Please just… just ignore him.”

“Between you two,” Will pointed at Zeller and Jack, “ and *you* ” - a stab of the finger at Hannibal - “it’s going to be a miracle if I make it to the end of this damn investigation without sending one or more of you to the Netherworld.”

Jack pinched the bridge of his nose. “The séance, Will. Please.”

Will clutched at his hair. “Maybe I would be able to do this fucking séance if you would all just shut the *fuck up* . No more talking - we clear?”

A few grim nods and Will’s shoulders dropped. “Good. One of you get the lights, please.”

Jimmy scurried forwards to switch the overhead lights off, plunging the basement room into total darkness.

“Wha- Zeller, don’t grab my hand like that!” Bev hissed. “Don’t tell me you’re scared of the dark.”

Will smirked to himself in the shadows.

Then, with an exhale of breath and a roll of his neck, each wick of the candles around the circle came alive with flames.

Jimmy squeaked. “How did you - ?! Never mind. Stupid question. You can raise the dead. Of course you can conjure fire from thin air.”

“What I’m going to do next may take minutes. It may take hours,” Will began, swallowing. “I’m going to have to go deeper than I have done in a very long time. If we want to find out whether our killer was successful in summoning whatever spirit or demon they’re after, you have to just trust me on the process of this. It’s not going to be pleasant.”

“And how does this differ from your usual magic?” Jack asked curtly.

“I’m going to put myself in a temporary state of death,” Will replied bluntly, meeting Jack’s eyes.

The shadows from the candles flickering on the floor cast horrific shadows across Will’s face. He looked… otherworldly.

“I’ll have no pulse. I’ll stop breathing. But I can bring myself out of it, eventually. It may just take some time.”

“You’re telling me we’re supposed to just let you lay here for potentially hours, not breathing, no heartbeat, and just *wait* for you to somehow make yourself alive again?” Bev deadpanned. “You realise how fucking insane that sounds?”

“I know,” Will agreed. “But time moves differently in the Netherworld. What feels like seconds can be hours, or vice versa. Time has no meaning, no structure there. You have to promise me that you won’t enter the circle.”

“What happens if we do?” Jimmy asked slowly.

“You don’t want to find out,” Will replied grimly. “I can’t protect you if you enter this circle whilst I’m transcending. You’re vulnerable to whatever is inside this circle with me.”

All sets of eyes narrowed in on Francesca’s corpse, peacefully laid in the centre of the circle still.

“You mean a spirit, or a demon, could be in this room whilst you’re… you’re transcending or whatever it is?” Zeller gulped.

“Potentially,” Will replied nonchalantly. “But they won’t leave this circle.”

“How do you *know* that though?” Zeller spluttered, inching to the door. “This is not safe, Jack, this is some new level of insane, whacked up witch bullshit, I - ”

“You can leave,” Will cut him off. “You all can. If you don’t feel safe, there’s no reason for you to be here.”

Zeller was out the door in an instant. Will grimaced. “Anyone else?”

“I’d hate it if you *actually* died, Will,” Jimmy responded. “I’ll stay just in case you actually do need mouth to mouth.”

Will shuddered. “I’d rather you just let me go.”

Jimmy’s jaw dropped at the infraction. Bev merely smirked, hiding the smile behind her hand.

“Remember,” Will started, kneeling back down on the floor, retrieving something wrapped in hemp cloth before he did so, “don’t come in the circle. Don’t try to wake me. Don’t touch me. *Especially* do not touch Francesca. Don’t disturb the salt, don’t mess with the candles. Now, can I begin?”

There was a stunned silence from the four of them, until they all nodded yes in unison.

“Good.”

Will settled himself next to Francesca’s corpse, unwrapping the cloth. Inside was a long, lethal looking blade. Its hilt was plain except for the deep runes that Hannibal knew by just looking at had not been put there by carving into the metal alone. These symbols had been breathed to life by pure magic, from the way they seemed to float and glow within the surface of the handle. The runes continued down the blade of the weapon, finishing just before the point of the blade.

Hannibal watched Bev wince in the corner of his eye as Will dragged he dagger horizontally along the inside of his wrist.

The witch stood gracefully, and walked a slow circle around Francesca’s body with his wrist held aloft, letting the blood splash to the floor around her whilst he hissed and muttered in that language Hannibal had so seldom heard in all his years of study and travel.

Will opened up his other wrist without a flinch, dipping his fingers into the wound and then leaning over Francesca’s body to draw a rune Hannibal recognised as a protective symbol on her forehead. He drew a matching rune on his own forehead and then laid down flat on his back next to Francesca’s lifeless body, taking her waxy, pale hand in his. Will’s eyes were half closed, heavy lidded, and his lips trembled as he whispered the same incantation over and over.

The room was deathly silent.

They watched as slowly, ever so slowly, Will’s breathing slowed to stop until his chest stopped rising and falling. His jaw fell slack, mouth hanging open, and his eyes…

Bev startled next to him at the sight.

In the dim candlelight, they could make out that the surface of Will’s eyes looked like fog. There was a grey, pearly cloud covering his eyes, obscuring his beautiful blue irises.

His hold on Francesca's hand went limp, and his own hand and arm fell gently back against his side.

They all watched with bated breath, expecting to see Will's chest rise again, his leg twitch, anything.

But the witch hadn't been lying. He really was lifeless. Dead.

Will was *dead* .

Jack swallowed. "I'm only now beginning to realise he wasn't shitting us when he said he'd… that he would die. He really is… he's dead, isn't he?"

Bev, Jack and Jimmy all turned to look at Hannibal - he was the expert in magic, after all, wasn't he?

Hannibal sent them a reassuring smile. "Will wouldn't have done this if he knew he couldn't perform this magic. He'll be alright, I promise."

"How do you know?" Jimmy swallowed, eyes flicking back to Will's body, as lifeless as Francesca.

"His magic will keep him tethered, allow him to come back to his body," Hannibal assured him. "Whilst I confess I have never *seen* a witch perform something as difficult as this before, I have heard of the transcension Will spoke of."

"How is this possible?" Bev whispered, her face looking *haunted* at the sight of Will's body.

"He uses his magic to temporarily transfer all his energy, his life force, into the transcension. His soul, his very *being* - he has travelled to the Netherworld. His body is merely the vessel he must return to, and his magic will do the rest of the work in bringing him back to life. His magic is essentially Ariadne's thread leading Theseus back out of the maze lair of the minotaur."

Jack shook his head. "I don't like it. At all."

"It is an uncomfortable thing to watch," Hannibal admitted. "But I would like to remind you of the *honour* it is to watch such rare, powerful magic at work. We may never see anything like this again in our lives."

"I don't think I would want to see this ever again," Jimmy whispered.

"How long will this take?" Jack asked, jaw clenched. "By your estimation? By what you know of this magic? All of this is so alien to us, Professor Lecter."

"He could wake any minute, as he said," Hannibal replied. "Or it could be hours. If that's the case, I suggest we take it in shifts to watch over him. I see no reason for us to all linger down here all day."

"I'm not going anywhere," Bev muttered. "I need to see him wake up again."

“And you shall, dear Beverly,” Hannibal smiled warmly at her. “Don’t fret; Will shall be fine.”

Jimmy shuffled nervously. “Well, what do we do?”

“Nothing. Nothing at all. We simply wait.”

A bead of melted wax from the black candle sat in the North position trickled to the floor, cooling and congealing between Will and Francesca’s head. Its flame flickered, back and forth, back and forth, until becoming utterly still again.

Another droplet of black wax ran to the floor.

Four

Chapter Notes

Psalm 22:14-15
I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint. My heart is like wax; it has melted within my breast. My strength is dried up like a potsherd, and my tongue cleaves to my jaws; thou dost lay me in the dust of death.

A cold wind caressed Will's face, making him stir. He blinked, sucking in a breath, and sat up slowly with a low groan from where he lay flat on his back. Everything was dark, so dark, around him. He often thought the bottom of the ocean must be like the Netherworld; utterly black, the pressure crippling, filled with abominable creatures.

He held his hands up to his face, pressing his fingers into his eyes until he saw bursts of colour behind his lids.

When he opened them again, Francesca stood before him.

She was just as naked as she had been when Will had first seen her slaughtered on her living room floor, but looking at her now, she was translucent, glowing. Soft light seemed to seep from her figure, lighting up the pitch blackness around them. She gave him an unimpressed look.

"You again."

"Listen, I want to be here just as much as you do," Will rasped, his throat straining.

She glowed a little brighter. "Can you take me back with you?"

Will pulled his knees up to his chest, clasping his arms around his legs. "I could. But you'd have to return here."

"Why?"

"Because you're dead, Francesca. An undead soul can't exist outside the Netherworld."

"Then how are you able to be here?" she asked accusingly, pointing out the unfairness.

"I'm dead," Will mumbled, flapping a hand through the nothing around them. "For a while anyway; it's complicated, and I don't have much time, so don't worry about it too much."

"I don't want to be here," she whispered, eyes swimming with tears that would never spill. "Are you sure I can't…"

Will shook his head, mouth downturned. “I’m sorry. This is it now, unless…”

Her translucent, glowing form closed the distance between them. “Unless what?”

“There’s every chance a deity could take interest in you, decide that you’re worthy to move on to a different kind of afterlife. But there’s no guarantee.”

“You mean God?” she asked, frowning.

Will smiled sadly. “If that’s who you want it to be, yeah. Whoever you want to believe in.”

“So, what? I just have to believe in *some* God and I can leave here? Is Jesus Christ himself going to send me to Heaven? Is Brahman going to let me reincarnate as some sort of fucking houseplant? How does it *work* , Will?”

“I can’t tell you. You won’t know yourself until you’ve wandered the Netherworld for a long time. The answer will either come to you or it won’t.”

“That,” she quipped, “is not helpful at all. So I’m just stuck in this darkness, in this *nothing* , until I find enlightenment? Doomed to Limbo?”

“I don’t know, Francesca,” Will sighed. “Maybe you should pray on it. Meditate on it. Whatever you think is most likely to get you out of here. *If* you can get out of here.”

“What do you want?” she asked abruptly.

“Come sit opposite me. I need to go back to the day of your murder.”

“You already asked me about that. I told you everything I know.”

“You want me to try and catch the guy who killed you?”

She nodded bluntly.

“Then sit. I need to touch you.”

She curled a lip at him, but complied. Francesca had been forty-three when she’d been murdered. No children, no spouse, very little friends. All immediate family dead. She worked on the checkout in her local Walmart.

Her life had been nothing, really, just like so many. But her death had been something monumental.

“Give me your hands,” Will instructed her quietly.

“What are you going to gain from this? I didn’t see him.”

“But I’ll be able to hear him.”

“What good will that do?” she asked miserably, giving Will her hands.

Their palms melted into each other, their bodies fusing where they touched and a spark of energy running up Will's veins. He grunted in discomfort.

"I'll be able to hear what he was doing. What he was trying to summon," Will explained. "We think he may have successfully conjured a demon through your death."

"Fuck," she exhaled. "What do I need to do? Just keep touching you?"

"Just focus on me."

Their eyes locked, and Will dug in deep.

"Please!" she screamed. "Please don't, I-I have money, take it, take my car, just please don't!"

"I have no need for your money or your car, my dear," he crooned gently. "And neither do you anymore. What an honour it will be for you, to give your life for this."

"No," she moaned weakly.

He stuffed her mouth with some kind of heavy, wet fabric, before pinning her left wrist to the floor and hammering the nail in all the way. She screamed, and screamed and screamed through the rag.

"There, there," he soothed her, brushing a gloved hand over her sweat damp hair. "It'll all be over soon."

The second nail squelched through her right palm under the weight of the hammer.

"You know, I used to believe this would never be possible," his voice all but purred next to her ear. "But you, my lovely Francesca, are going to make all these years of work come to fruition."

He slid down her body, cradling her feet. "He will be most pleased with me."

Francesca kicked with all her might, legs flailing out. Her heel struck something solid, maybe his jaw. He grabbed her left ankle and the nail pierced her skin with brutal force from a swing of the hammer.

"Careful," he warned her. "I have important work to do here. Such glorious, beautiful work."

Francesca sobbed through the rag, blindness terrorising her. She could feel her eyeballs resting by her cheek.

"I tried for so long to summon the Morning Star himself," the man explained, stroking his hands over her calves. "So many different rituals, spells… none of it worked. I realised eventually such a force requires blood, the offering of a life, and that's when I began this work."

She shrieked, muffled and muted, as the last nail punctured her foot.

"And still, the Morning Star would not answer. I began to lose faith, Francesca," the man explained sadly. "But then, one night, a whisper carried on the wind; oh, it was like nothing else. He called to me, Francesca. To me *, of all people. How could I deny him? He wanted me, wanted to call me into his service."*

There was silence for a moment, and then what sounded like the turning of pages.

"Who, you might be wondering?" her killer chuckled as he straddled her waist. "Shall I tell you, pretty one? Do you want to know?"

She merely tried to breathe. To stay alive.

He crouched forwards, lips against her hair. "Belial. Belial. Belial."

His weight shifted, sitting back up over her hips. "My Lord. The Leader of the Sons of Darkness."

The sharp, pointed end of a blade suddenly ripped into the skin between her clavicles. She thrashed, but the nails held her down, the weight on her hips from the killer keeping her in place. It didn't stop, agonising moments stretching out for what felt like forever. He carved deep, deep enough to hit bone, and it didn't end. He cut her down to her pubic bone, drawing with the knife like an artist with a pencil on paper. Large, searing cuts, tiny, stinging cuts.

The blood started to pool underneath her back, weeping from her abdomen.

And then the chanting started; low, monotone words she didn't know or recognise. Arabic? Hebrew? Fire started crawling through her arteries, her skin feeling flayed from her bones even in the places where it still clung to her body. She arched her back in a scream and whatever the man had cut into her abdomen began to burn like Hell Fire itself.

"He's coming, Francesca. He's coming *."*

The blade sliced across her throat in one quick, fluid slash. She wasn't sure if it was Death itself that was making her go so cold, or if it was something else, but suddenly she felt like the floor had turned to ice beneath her, the hot blood that pumped from her throat practically Arctic.

"Belial! Belial, my Lord - "

The man's voice cut off abruptly as if he'd been strangled. She was fading. Fading, fading, fading.

So much blood.

"You're here," he whispered. "You're really here. Let me serve you, let me love…"

Her heart stopped. Her lungs deflated. Her soul shuddered. She was dead.

Will snatched his hands back with a startled yell. Francesca's face crumpled with sobs and tears that would not come.

"Did it work?" she whispered, throat thick with unshed tears.

Will's lower lip trembled. "It worked. It… he summoned a demon."

Francesca stood slowly, shaking her head. "Good luck, Will."

She turned and left, leaving Will sat in stunned silence in the blackness. He watched her translucent, glowing form walk further and further away from him until she faded into a minute dot in the blackness. He didn't take his eyes from her, staring at the spot where she had been.

Suddenly, the hair on the back of his neck stood up and something sent him scrambling forwards to his feet, breathing ragged. Something was here.

"Who's there?" he whispered, turning in a slow circle.

The blackness taunted him whilst a slow, hissing sound crawled its way towards him, rising to a crescendo. Will whipped around, trying to find the source of the noise.

"I'm leaving," he gritted out. "You can rest. I'm going, I promise."

A breath slid along the back of his neck, something stroking a curl at his nape. Will's breath choked in his throat and he spun again to see nothing but utter darkness before him.

" *Little witch* ," a soft whisper blew against his ear.

It spoke in the Old Tongue, the near dead form of Aramaic Will used during his rituals and spells.

" *Who are you* ?" Will bit out, fear prickling up his spine.

The nothing-ness felt like it was caving in around him.

" *No good will come of this* ," the voice softly sighed against his ear once more, something cold caressing his jaw.

Will steeled himself. " *Is that a threat* ?"

A hollow, sadistic chuckle reverberated throughout the darkness around him, and Will swallowed. This was no meagre spirit. This was not a soul of the Dead, wandering through the Netherworld. This was something *monstrous,* something as old as time itself. It was pressing in around him, his skin crawling, its soft breath mouthing along his neck and his hair like a lover. Its voice was indiscernible, neither female nor male. It made his core quiver.

" *Our paths will cross again, Will."*

“How do you know who I am?” Will hissed back in the Old Tongue, hands curling into fists, power bubbling beneath his skin.

“ *How enchanting,”* the voice goaded him, “ *all that power simmering in your blood. I wonder how it tastes* .”

Tiring of this being, this demon, whatever it was, Will closed his eyes and centred himself, drawing his power to him. He felt it ebb and flow through his limbs, in his blood, drawing to his head in a dizzying rush. He needed to leave.

“ *Stay, little Necromancer* ,” the voice lilted, dancing around him. “ *This is where you belong after all, here with the dead. With me* .”

Will ignored it, cradling himself in his own arms, crouching down as he began to mutter the incantation that would bring him back to the land of the living. A wind picked up around him, and the hissing sound began again. Will tried to block it all out, digging deeper into the well of power that sat within him, pulling and yanking at it to transcend himself back to the floor of the post-mortem lab in New Orleans.

“Will.”

Will gasped, eyes flying open. “Mom?”

There was nothing. No one before him. A trick. Will shook it off and bit out his next incantation, feeling his skin start to shimmer, his bones shake.

“Will? Will, don’t go.”

His father’s voice . Will didn’t even know if his father was dead.

He doubled down, began to feel himself lift, began to feel the pressure around him slip away. It was working. He clung to his magic, frantically whispering the words of the spell that would bring him back.

“Will! *Oh Dios* , Will, it’s me!”

Will sobbed, faltering. “You’re not here. You’re not here.”

“Oh mi amor, soy yo!”

“No!” Will yelled, refusing to open his eyes.

It couldn’t be *her* . It just couldn’t. Will would know if he was in *her* presence.

And then he was lifting, truly lifting, descending from the Netherworld. A snarl sounded around him and something latched on to his wrist as he began to fade. Will’s power sparked within him, crackling from his skin and causing whatever demon that had seized him to let go. But then it was back, tearing at him, dragging at him with vicious pulls and swipes.

“ *It is only a matter of time, my love. I’m coming for you.”*

Will fought with all his might, draining the well inside of him, clawing his way through the pitch black around him. His head span, his limbs felt detached from his body, and the very particles of darkness around him seemed to vibrate until he broke, like a diver breaching the water and gasping for air and gasping and gasping until -

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“Will!”

“Stop!” Hannibal hissed, arm lashing out to stop Bev in her tracks.

Will’s body *levitated* off the floor a few inches, a gurgled cry falling from his mouth as the flames of the candles all around him snuffed out with an impossible wind cutting through the sealed room from nowhere like a knife. His body trembled, the fog over his eyes dissipating, and he gulped for air like a fish thrown overboard.

He slumped back to the ground with a thud, rolling onto his side with a sob. His eyes were streaming with tears, his chest heaving with sobs that split the deathly silence of the lab apart, and blood began to trickle from his nose in rivulets. Bev’s stomach churned when she saw the crimson liquid spilling from his ears.

Jack started forwards, but Hannibal stepped in front of him.

“You can’t, Jack,” Hannibal protested. “We cannot enter the circle. He must close it himself, and close it properly.”

Will was delirious, curled in on himself and *sobbing* , crying like a child. His shoulders heaved with cries, his sobs gut-wrenching, heart breaking.

“Help him,” Jack demanded, baring his teeth. “Do something.”

Hannibal gave him a warning look, before turning and carefully approaching the salt circle. He crouched down as close as he could to the circle, itching to reach out and touch Will, to drag him from behind the line of salt despite his rational mind telling him what a terrible idea that would be. The ritual had to be finished properly before Will could leave the circle.

“Will,” Hannibal said softly. “Will, I need you to listen to me.”

Will shuddered with another sob. “I - I… oh *God* .”

“Will,” Hannibal tried again. “You need to end this properly, and quickly. I know whatever you saw down there was not what you were expecting, but the gateway is still open. Whatever was in there with you can still follow you out, you’re not *safe* yet.”

The witch’s limbs trembled as he tried to sit up, the blood still oozing from his nose and ears. His arms gave way beneath him, as if he had no strength left at all. Bev began to panic that maybe he didn’t - what if dying and bringing himself back had depleted everything Will had?

“You have to try, Will, you *must* ,” Hannibal insisted. “You know what will happen the longer you keep the gateway open.”

Will's eyes fixed on Hannibal, something unreadable swimming in them. "I k-know. I know, but I…"

"Don't you dare," Hannibal suddenly snarled. "You are not to go back, you *cannot* give in to it."

"What's he talking about?" Jack exclaimed, voice laden with worry.

"This ritual is dangerous for a reason," Hannibal bit out. "The Netherworld does not like letting go of what enters it. He's feeling the pull to go back. To truly die."

"Graham!" Jack yelled, marching over to Hannibal's side. "Get yourself together! You're not going *anywhere* , do you hear me?"

Will swallowed, closing his eyes. "Blood. I need blood."

Jack's face twisted. "Bev, get him some fucking blood, I don't care where from - "

"No," Will rasped, breathing becoming shallow. "Needs to be fresh. The spell won't take anymore of mine."

"You don't look like you have enough left to give," Jimmy murmured, distressed. "Do I need to call for a medic?"

"Blood," Will hissed out, eyes opening with effort. He could feel the pull tugging and groping at him to let go, to slip back into blissful darkness.

" *Stay, little Necromancer . This is where you belong after all, here with the dead. With me* ."

"I'll do it," Hannibal muttered. "Beverly, would you be so kind as to hand me a scalpel?"

"Are you sure?" she asked cautiously, but grabbed one from the medical stand anyway, handing it to him.

"Tell me what you need me to do, Will," Hannibal murmured gently, willing the witch to keep his eyes open.

Will struggled to sit upright again, his skin deathly pale, his lips drained of colour. "Cut your palm or your wrist - you'll need to cut deep to get enough blood. You need to make sure it soaks the salt. Keep the rest of your body out of the circle."

Hannibal didn't waste a moment, slicing the palm of his hand viciously, standing immediately to begin walking the perimeter of the circle and letting the crimson liquid splash over the salt on the floor.

Will rolled onto his back, eyes closing, mouth fluttering as he began to whisper the spell that would seal the gateway to the Netherworld he had opened. Hannibal flicked his gaze between making sure his blood hit the salt and Will's ashen face, watching his lips quiver.

When it was done, Will shakily pointed to his satchel. "Chalk. Give me the chalk."

Jack snatched it out of the bag and tossed it into the circle with Will, who somehow rolled himself to his hands and knees, hands shaking as he grasped the chalk. His whole arm shook as he began to draw a giant rune on the floor, never ceasing to mumble and whisper the words of the spell that cast a seal of protection.

Finally, after what felt like aeons, Will crawled over the line of the salt circle and collapsed to the floor. He was unconscious before he could even hear his name being called, before he felt warm, broad hands lift him from the ground.

Somewhere in the distance there was the soft hum of the TV. He could smell warm bread, and his head was pillowed under something soft.

“Welcome back.”

Will kept his eyes closed. “Of all the people that had to be here.”

“I insisted,” Hannibal murmured softly. “I do, after all, know better about the effects of magic than your colleagues. As much as Beverly would have liked to have stayed to look after you, she is more comfortable being able to make herself useful in the lab.”

Will opened his eyes. They were in his living room, and from what he could tell, the sun had just set. Hannibal had switched on a couple of the large lamps around the room, casting a comforting orange glow across the room. He was laid out on the sofa, a blanket carefully tucked around him. Hannibal was sitting in the armchair opposite him, a book open in his lap as he watched Will. He’d removed his pretentious suit jacket, shirt sleeves rolled up, tie off and top buttons undone.

Will ignored the strange warmth that spread in his stomach at the sight of Hannibal’s toned forearms from where his shirt was carefully rolled up, shoving the feeling aside. He sat up slowly, carefully, and hissed at the almighty throb in his head as he did so. Hannibal nodded to the aspirin and water that were waiting for him on the coffee table.

“You can leave now,” Will muttered, reaching for the painkillers and swallowing them dry despite the horrified look on Hannibal’s face.

“Your home is heavily warded,” Hannibal remarked, ignoring him as he looked up, eyes sweeping over the ceiling. “From what, I wonder?”

Will flinched. “I’m not doing this with you.”

“Doing what, Will?”

Why did the Professor look… *handsome* , with the orange glow of the lamps sweeping over his severe cheekbones, hazing his eyes in an amber gleam?

“Having you in my home. I don’t want you here.”

“As you wish,” Hannibal said softly, but made no move to get up and gather his things.

A beat of silence passed between them.

“I prepared you dinner, if you want it. You need to get your strength back after what you did this morning.”

Will burrowed down further into the sofa, the thought of food turning his stomach. “How long was I out for?”

“Six hours.”

“Fuck,” he cursed softly. “Felt like thirty minutes.”

“Do you want to talk about it? About what happened down there?”

Will shuddered. “I don’t know if I can.”

“You found Francesca.”

“Yes.”

“And something else found you?”

Will simply nodded, reaching for the glass of water Hannibal had left him and taking a gulp, before realising how thirsty he was and then draining the whole glass. Hannibal wordlessly stood, took the glass from him and disappeared to the kitchen. He returned with a refilled glass in moments, sitting back down again opposite Will after handing it to him.

“What was it?”

“Something old,” Will croaked. “Something very old.”

“It would not reveal itself to you?”

“No. But I have a feeling it’s waiting for me, lurking somewhere. It wanted me to stay, but then… then as I managed to break free from it, it told me it was coming for me.”

“Will,” Hannibal said sharply, leaning forwards. “Did it get through?”

“I don’t know,” Will whispered, eyes welling with tears once more and his throat stinging with his anguish. “I don’t think I can stop it, not if it wants to find me again. It was *powerful* , Hannibal.”

“You must regain your strength,” Hannibal told him gently. “Please, allow me to serve you the dinner I made. It will help.”

Will pressed his fingers into his eyes. “Fine.”

He was too tired. Too tired to care, to argue, to think of a snarky comeback.

How Hannibal had found the ancient TV dinner tray, Will wasn’t sure, but moments later the older man was setting it down before him and placing a bowl of steaming soup and freshly

baked bread before him. Will groaned as he pushed himself up, his limbs feeling like lead.

“Let me,” Hannibal insisted softly, his large hands clasping Will’s shoulders and helping him sit up.

Will nearly yelped at the contact. When was the last time someone had touched him?

Hannibal returned to the armchair opposite him, watching Will like a hawk as the witch picked up the spoon with a shaking hand.

“Thank you,” Will gritted out, glancing up at Hannibal. “For the soup. And for… for the blood, before, in the lab.”

Hannibal merely watched him, still and hawk like, a possessive glint shimmering in his burgundy eyes. “Eat, Will.”

Five

Chapter Notes

Matthew 8:11-12
I tell you, many will come from east and west and sit at table with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven, while the sons of the kingdom will be thrown into the outer darkness; there men will weep and gnash their teeth."
So this chapter is the longest yet, I'm sorry it's such a wordy one. It was difficult to write, and has some themes that could be upsetting, including self harm and suicide. We get into Will's childhood here, and start to understand how his early years impact him.

Lafayette, Louisiana, 25 years ago

Will stared around at the barren spare room that was now "his". It was so different from the snug den of a bedroom he'd pieced together for himself over the years at his mother's house. But that place wasn't his anymore.

Had it really ever been?

It had been a month since his mom had passed away. Two very long, confusing years of illness and chemotherapy and operations and then finally the month-long stint in the hospice for end of life care. That had been September when she'd died. It was October now, and things were… he didn't know. He just knew he felt like dying most days.

The ripped up, pulverised, tormented feeling he awoke with every morning after very few hours of fitful sleep was starting to eat him alive.

The worst part, he thought, was that his mother had never even loved him. She had always been so cold, a cruel, disapproving shadow in the corner of everything he did. It didn't matter how hard he tried to be good at everything, no matter how hard he tried to please her, he was not enough. He never had been. He was sure she'd loved him at some point, when he was a baby, but then he had grown and had started looking more and more like his father every single day. And wasn't that just a kick in the gut?

She'd remarried after the split with his dad. It was no secret that her affair with Tommy had been the reason for his parents' divorce in the first place, and Will quickly learnt that for all of his pretence and façade to be good guy, Tommy saw Will as nothing more than a hindrance, a *thing* in the way of his life with his woman.

His mother, Josephine, kept Will alive, and that had been about it. He was fed and clothed, his school grades closely monitored and homework and assignments insisted upon, and that

was the extent of Josephine's care. There was the faintest glimmer, now and then, that kept the flame of hope burning in Will that she really did love him. Sometimes it was the offer to watch a movie with him, to discuss a book she thought he'd enjoy, to give him a ride over to a friend's place. And it kept Will clinging on for his entire childhood, this hope that she had maybe cared for him, right up until she died when he was thirteen.

He'd stayed for a week in the house he had grown up in, and then his bags were packed and he was shipped off to his father's.

After his mother's funeral, at which he was not mentioned *once* , the mother of his one and only true friend had offered to let Will come home with her and Jacob, his best friend. Will had been sitting in the corner of the room at the wake, silently crying, when she'd spotted him and realised Will needed to be anywhere other than where he was. He and Jacob had sat side by side on Jacob's bedroom floor, backs resting against the bed, staring at the wall in front of them. Jacob had slid his arm around Will's shoulders and let him bawl.

When Jacob's mom dropped him home that night, he found Tommy, inebriated and gazing at nothing on the porch. He passed by him silently and went to his room, only to find that since they had left for Josephine's funeral that morning, Tommy had put all of Will's belongings into trash bags on the floor and started dismantling his closet and bed.

"Tommy?" Will had whispered behind him on the porch, his heart in his chest. "Why's all my stuff packed up? What happened to my bed?"

"It's time for you to go, Will. Call your dad to come get you."

And it had been as simple as that. Beau Graham had picked Will up and taken him back to his house. That was the last time he saw Tommy, despite the fact the man had virtually watched him grow up for nine years.

Beau Graham had no clue about raising children, let alone a thirteen year old boy who was now motherless. Beau and Josephine had divorced when Will was four years old, and it had been nine years since the boy had lived with Beau. Beau had never remarried - there'd been a revolving door of girlfriends, flings, some Will had met and liked, some that had set his blood boiling. He saw his dad every other weekend. He'd pick Will up on a Saturday at noon and have him dropped off by four in the afternoon on Sunday. Will had never known any different.

But now he was here, in this shabby little spare room, and he felt like dying.

The feeling didn't go away.

His dad was barely ever home. He was gone for work down on the boat yards by the time Will woke up for school, and when he came home at night, he grunted a few words at Will about how his day had been, had he eaten yet, and then promptly passed out on the sofa. They never ate together; Will sustained himself on the meagre groceries his dad left in the refrigerator and cupboards for dinner, and Beau usually ate something in his truck from the drive-thru on the way home. At weekends, they'd awkwardly stand side by side fishing, watching TV, helping his dad in the garage with tinkering with motor boats.

Will had never felt so alone.

He detached from everyone at school, until even Jacob seemed like a distant stranger, despite the fact they'd been joined at the hip since first grade. He locked himself away in the library every lunch, head buried in books. In those long, lonely hours at home whilst his dad was still at work, Will wasn't really sure how he spent his time. Nothing interested him, nothing sustained him. Music was grating, TV was boring. He'd read until his eyes hurt, and then the loneliness crept up his spine again.

He just wanted his mom. He wanted his mom to have *liked* him. To have loved him.

The self-harm was the only thing that kept him going some days. It had been going on for years, since Josephine had become ill when he was eleven, but had spiralled after her death. The only thing that grounded him, made him feel like he was still here, was the sharp drag of the blade he'd removed from a pencil sharpener over his ankles. It was easy to cover up, easy to lie about that way. At least that's what he told himself when the other boys in the locker rooms saw the red seeping through his socks, or caught glimpses of the crusted red lines sunk deep into his skin whilst he pulled on his gym socks.

"Faggot," one of them had whispered under his breath from the other side of the changing room. "Thought only *girls* did that kind of stuff."

Will started changing in the toilet cubicles after that.

His dad never noticed the blood stains on the bedsheets - Will did all his own laundry, all his own cooking, cleaned the house. Beau Graham was good for nothing more than a few lines of pleasantries they exchanged before he promptly passed out on the sofa all night, snoring loudly.

He cut too deep one night, across his left shin, after he realised there was no more room on both his ankles. The cut opened up to reveal fat underneath, blood streaming like a burst dam. Will had gone cold and shaky and had nearly thrown up at the sensation, but then lay there on his bed, gasping and grinning.

He was here. He was alive.

Beau brought home a new girlfriend one day. Daphne. Will immediately took to her. She was warm and smiled at him like he'd always wished his mother had. His dad had met her at church and after a few well-meaning but nosey murmurs of ' *Daphne's a good woman, Beau, and that boy needs a mother figure in his life* ', that's what she became. Will *adored* her. Raced home from school every day to see her, spend time with her, to feel the loneliness ebb away a little inside of him.

And then one day she didn't go home. She moved in seemingly overnight, and never left. Will couldn't have been happier. She cooked for him and his dad, sat up talking for hours to Will, watched movies with him, took him to the barber when Beau failed to notice his son's hair was becoming scraggly and untameable, sung along to horrendous cheesy country radio stations with him whilst they drove home from grocery shopping. She *hugged* him, mussed his hair, patted his back.

Will felt like he finally had what his own mother *should* have been.

Until one day she changed.

“I’ve got a bone to pick with you,” were her first words when he came home from school one afternoon.

“What did I do?” he asked, wide eyed and freezing in the doorway.

All of a sudden he was transported back to Josephine, her figure stood over him, sneering at him and telling him she couldn’t even stand to look at his face.

She held aloft an empty tub of ice cream fished out of the trash can. “Who said you could eat the last of this?”

“I-I’m sorry Daphne, I didn’t realise I couldn’t,” Will mumbled. “I can go buy you a new one?”

“ This was mine,” she said through clenched teeth. “And I was feeling so sick all day, Will, and all I wanted was this ice cream. But *you* ate it all.”

“I’m sorry,” he whispered, hating the tears that welled in his eyes. “It won’t happen again.”

She turned her back on him without another word.

That was how it started. The food restrictions. She’d count his lunch money when he got home, demanding to know what he’d eaten that day. Suddenly there was specific cereal that was his and his only, and he was *not* to touch any other boxes of cereal. And if he ran out of that cereal before she went grocery shopping again? Tough shit - no breakfast. Lunch was non-existent - he was greedy for wanting lunch in between breakfast and dinner, according to her. Dinner was what she planned and what she wanted to eat. Whilst Will did appreciate the cooking, because she was a damn good cook, he didn’t appreciate the piles of mess and clutter she ordered him to clean up after. That, or the wordless help he had to be in the kitchen, peeling vegetables, deboning chickens whilst she refused to talk to him.

It wasn’t long until Daxton and Levi came along. They were Daphne’s two nephews, her brother’s children, who’d been flung into the foster care system after CPS removed them from their mother. Their mother, who was addled with drugs and had attacked the eldest, Daxton, with a knife on numerous occasions. Daphne’s brother was in prison for armed robbery, and when CPS contacted her asking her if she’d consider fostering, she took them on.

By this point, Will was a shell of himself. The warm glow Daphne had brought to life in him quickly puttered out into ashes. He started cutting more and more each night, barely sleeping, wordless as he drifted around Beau’s house trying to go unnoticed. Daphne’s claws were deep in Beau, and as far as his father was concerned, their little family unit was just fine. Beau either chose to ignore the state of Will, or he was truly so ignorant he didn’t realise what was happening to his son.

He didn’t see the hollowed out bags underneath Will's eyes. Eyes that had lost all spark, turned lacklustre. Dead eyes. He didn’t notice the way Will barely spoke, barely raised his head. He paid no mind to the fact his son only appeared when he was summoned by Daphne to do some menial chore or other. Will’s suffering was invisible to him, and Will began to hate him for it.

Because surely Beau loved him, right? Surely his dad had those instincts hard wired into him, to prioritise and cherish his only child?

Will decided his father was a fool. Blinded by his honeymoon phase with Daphne that was far from over, it seemed.

Daxton and Levi were a lot. Of course they were. They were eight and five years old, and had been beaten every day of their lives. Forced to steal and beg when their mother, high as a kite somewhere, neglected to feed them. Daxton had been selling drugs on street corners just before Daphne had taken them in.

But unfortunately, the abuse didn’t stop there. Daphne picked up where their mother had left off.

Whilst she’d never once laid a hand on Will, preferring to psychologically abuse him instead, she lashed out and beat those boys as if they were grown men. They both still wet the bed, which earned them nightly beatings. The back of her hand, a wooden spoon grabbed from the kitchen counter. Daxton pulled his hair out, left clumps of it hidden under the mattress.

He walked around with his head hung and a black eye whenever Daphne found it. And she found it often.

“Will?” His dad called him one day.

He’d shuffled downstairs obediently, eyes avoiding Daphne and Beau out of fear of beratement.

He just wanted a kind smile. A hug. When was the last time someone had fucking hugged him?

“We’ve got some exciting news to tell you,” Beau had announced. “We’ve been saving for a little while, and something real good has come up. We’re buying a new house for all of us, more room for the five of us. Ain’t that great?”

Will blinked. Forced the well rehearsed, well practised smile onto his face. “Really? That’s amazing Dad! When… when are we moving?”

“Next month,” Beau beamed, pecking Daphne’s cheek.

A week later, on the rare occasion Beau had offered to pick him up from school, Will broke down in tears.

“Dad,” he croaked. “I don’t feel good. I feel… I don’t feel like myself.”

Beau was silent. Icy, stony, silent. And it was then Will saw the murderous look of rage on his face.

“What’s wrong?” Will asked, throat thick through the tears.

“Daphne wants to leave us. We’re splitting up.”

“ *What* ?” Will gasped.

Beau smacked his hand off the steering wheel. “It’s you, Will! You can’t try, goddammit! You can’t make the effort that we’re all tryin’ to make! We could be a family, but you’re ruining it! You’re the reason she’s leaving!”

“What are you talking about?” Will stammered, his heart pounding in his chest.

“Daphne sees every day how much you hate those boys! You won’t even have a conversation with Daxton and Levi! You sulk around the house like some ungrateful brat, and it ain’t working because of *you* !” Beau yelled. “So when we get back to that house, you better go and *plead* with her, boy! Because if I lose a good woman over you - ”

“I’m sorry!” Will gasped, beginning to feel his lungs tighten, perilously so. “I’m sorry, I didn’t mean it, I promise! I-I’ll be better, I’ll be good, just - ”

“I love her - and she’s leaving because you won’t try and make this family work. Just think about that, Will.”

“I don’t know how to be in a family,” Will whispered, the tears running thick and fast down his face. “I don’t…”

“Well neither do I, but I’m still givin’ it my best, ain’t I?” Beau seethed, shaking his head. “You think this is easy for me? Nine years I was on my own for! I don’t know what the hell I’m doing either, but what we need is to make this work! You, me, Daphne and the boys!”

“My mom died,” Will choked out. “My mom only just died. Can’t you just give me more time? Everything has happened so fast, it’s only been six months!”

“Yeah? Well just because she’s dead doesn’t mean she’s Saint-fucking-Josephine!” Beau spat. “You always wanted to come live with me, Will. You said every weekend I saw you how much you hated going back there, how much you didn’t like living with Tommy and your mom. And now you’re runnin’ the same spiel with me and Daphne? When is anything ever gonna be *good enough* for you?”

Will’s words wouldn’t come. He didn’t know what to say - so he simply sat and cried into his hands the rest of the car ride home, dreading walking through the front door and having to face Daphne. Panic bubbled in his chest like the stirrings of a storm, paralysing him.

He threw himself at her feet and sobbed. He begged her not to go. Pleaded with her that he’d change, that he’d be better, just please don’t go, please don’t *leave* , how he loved her, how much she meant to him and everything she did for him.

Without a shred of emotion in her voice, she coldly patted his shoulder and sighed: “Alright, Will. Alright.”

They moved into the new house. His father and Daphne got married in a whirlwind.

Daphne berated and yelled and raged at him when she found he’d used a bowl she hadn’t told him he could use for his breakfast cereal before school. Apparently Will should have known without being told that he was only allowed to use one cup, one bowl, one plate, and one set of cutlery.

Daxton, Levi and him were banned from sitting on any of the furniture. She didn’t want any of them ruining her new suede sofa, her new oak dining chairs, and so Will and the other boys sat on the floor at meal times, in the living room when watching TV.

Will had his own room, but had to keep all of his clothes inside of a suitcase. The closet was for Daphne’s overflowing hoard of clothes from at least twenty years ago, that she no longer fit into, but insisted she might wear again one day.

She’d had a meltdown when she discovered someone had stepped on the bath mat after getting out of the shower, screaming at them all that they had to dry their feet *before* getting out of the shower. She didn’t like the feel of a wet bath mat.

She found Levi had doodled on the walls whilst she’d locked him away in his and Daxton’s bedroom for two days as punishment for something Will couldn’t even remember. When she found it, she’d dragged him by the ankle down the stairs, ignoring his screeches as his head hit every step, and then had shoved him out onto the street. She locked the door and left him there for four hours to sob and cry and plead to be let back in.

They’d gone to a fireworks show one night, and when she’d discovered Daxton had stolen a bag of candy floss, she hit him so hard on the car ride home his front tooth came loose and fell out of his mouth.

Beau ignored it all. He came home from work in foul moods, like a thunder cloud, and Will steered well clear of him. He crept out of his room to eat and go to school, and that was that.

It carried on like that until one day he couldn't take it any more.

He ran himself a bath one night, and tried to cut his wrists open in the warm water. But something deep in his gut stopped him from cutting deep enough, despite the fact he was so determined.

He’d been prescribed medication for his insomnia - not that it did a whole lot, with the dosage he was on. After the bath, he emptied out every pill from its packet, every tablet of aspirin and ibuprofen he could find, which was a lot, considering he had constant headaches and was always taking painkillers. He didn’t know if they’d do anything, but he even found an old pack of antibiotics he’d never finished and added them to the pile.

He sat on his bed, counting out all the pills. Forty-five in total. He didn’t know if it would be enough, but he started anyway.

At first he crammed handfuls into his mouth, swigging them down with water. All he could see was the image of his mother's dead body when he'd visited her in the funeral home, staring at her strange embalmed state.

He was starting to forget what she sounded like. What she smelt like. He could count on one hand the number of times he remembered her hugging him.

Another mouthful of pills, and he started to feel regret and panic rise within his chest. But he pushed on, forcing the last of the pills down his throat, until every last one of them was gone. And then he sat, breathing raggedly, until that panic sent him tumbling down the stairs to confess to his dad what he'd done.

Beau's face had been stricken.

Will didn't remember much after that. He could recall hazy fragments of being in the back of his dad's truck as he rushed him to the hospital. He remembered his head lolling as he had his vitals taken, remembered being set down on a hospital bed and poked and prodded whilst there was hushed discussion of whether to pump his stomach, whether he'd have lasting kidney or liver damage. The rest was all delirium. Blackness.

When he fell unconscious, he was acutely aware he didn't really feel like he was *there* in the hospital anymore. But everything felt warm and fuzzy and *good* , and Jesus Christ, when was the last time anything had felt *good* ?

" *You have to go back soon* ."

Will couldn't open his eyes; couldn't see. Couldn't speak. But he heard the voice, and it felt so near. All he had were his thoughts to try and reply back to it with.

"Don't want to. Feels good here."

" *I know. But it's not time yet, beloved."*

How strange. When was the last time anyone had ever had a term of endearment for him?

" *It is cruel to send you back there, Will. But it must be done. You have important decisions to make. Things to be."*

"I'm not anything. I'm no-one. And I can't live there anymore. I can't live anywhere, at all. I just… it hurts too much."

" *The hurt will fade. I promise.* "

"I'm not strong enough. Never have been. They're all better off without me."

" *Is that what you truly believe, dear one? You could not be more wrong about your strength. You have no idea of the wells of your power, of what you will grow into.* "

Will felt like he was floating, sinking, burrowing into warm cotton wool. "I'm not gonna grow into anything. I'm going to die - it's what I wanted to do, after all. I just wanted this one

thing for myself. I've had everything else taken away from me."

" *Happiness seems like a strange concept right now, doesn't it?"*

Will burrowed further, smiling, if it was possible. He didn't know; he just felt so *peaceful* .

" *You are loved, Will. You are so loved, you could not comprehend it. I promise I will watch over you, as I always have done."*

If this had been real, if he'd been awake, Will would have sneered. "Doesn't feel like anyone is watching over me. Feels like it's all just been bad, bad, bad. Bad from the get go. Don't I get to have my say in ending that?"

" *You are loved, Will* ."

When Will woke up, he lurched upright and vomited the entire contents of his stomach over the railing of the hospital bed. It was the middle of the night, and there was no one else on this small section of the children's ward. His dad and Daphne were nowhere to be seen. The nurse on the night shift was sitting behind the window in her office, head in one hand as she read a book. Will shakily got to his legs, stumbling like a colt walking for the first time, and hid himself in the bathroom attached to the ward whilst he continued to violently vomit.

He passed out again, and the nurse finally found him a while later on the floor.

When he woke up again, Beau and Daphne and a woman from CPS were sat by his bedside.

Of course - of course it would trigger a visit from CPS. Daphne was fostering her nephews, and hadn't adopted them. It really wouldn't look good if another child in the home had tried to kill themselves.

The warning look in both Daphne and Beau's faces told Will all he needed to know about what answers to give the woman.

When they got home, Beau had roared and yelled at him. Will thought he might hit him. He didn't, but the rage was palpable in Beau's words, his face. Beau told him he was selfish. That he was ungrateful. Accused him of all sorts of things. Asked Will how could he do that *to* Beau, as if overdosing and trying to end his life had been a direct slight aimed at his father, and nothing at all to do with crippling grief and depression and abuse.

Will went quiet again. He endured. But something had changed in him.

Plants would wilt and rot and die from a mere fingertip gliding over their leaves when Will touched them. A boy that laughed and mocked Will in gym class suddenly began bleeding profusely from his nose, falling to his knees and spluttering up blood. Daphne's precious oak dining chairs that Will was not allowed to sit on all burst into flames one evening as he sat on the floor with Daxton and Levi, barely tasting the food he ate.

His dad's fishing gear malfunctioned, knotted into impossible binds that couldn't be undone every time he went fishing. The girl who'd made vicious, obvious taunts behind Will's back in science class about his deceased mother somehow went flying down the steep stairs in the

science block after lesson one day, breaking both her legs from the fall. She hadn't tripped - Will watched as an invisible hand seemed to push her. Will heard whispers in church on Sunday about how Tommy, his once stepfather, had crashed his new Mercedes that Will knew full well he'd bought when Josephine's life insurance paid off the mortgage on the house.

Was it Karma? Will wasn't sure. Maybe he had a guardian angel.

Until he realised it was *him.* He himself was the cause of all of this - the pit that roared and gnashed its teeth inside of the desolate, vile innards of him had turned into something *more* . He realised it one day when he thought very long and very hard about how he'd wished all of Daphne's precious fucking crockery that he wasn't allowed to even look at would shatter into pieces.

And it did - an entire set of plates, bowls, side plates, teacups. All in pieces on the floor as an invisible wind had blown the cabinet doors open and every single piece had been swiped onto the kitchen floor.

She'd caught him smiling, and her gaze narrowed.

The months had begun to blur into years, and before he knew it, Will had turned sixteen. It passed without comment, without acknowledgement, other than a *Happy Birthday Son!* birthday card handed over to him with a grunt from Beau with twenty dollars inside.

Will had swallowed the tears and muttered a thank you.

One day when he came home from school, Beau and Daphne were waiting for him in the living room, Daxton and Levi banished upstairs. Daphne had his diary open on her lap, and the smug gleam in her eyes told Will he was *done* .

"You," she began, "you're a child of the *Devil* . And we won't stand for it any longer, Will."

He said nothing, statue still, frozen on the spot. This was one of the many things he hated about himself - that his fight or flight instincts didn't even seem to work. Years of neglect and abuse had hardwired him to *freeze* . To placate and apologise and bend to the will of others, to make himself as small as he could possibly be, with the hope of surviving.

Beau took his diary. "Daphne is a cruel bitch, who's done nothing but make me miserable. I hate her. I hate them all. Dad doesn't even see what's happening right before his eyes."

"That's private," Will choked out, eyes beginning to fog over.

"Why can't they just see what awful people they are? I hope they all end up fucking miserable, because that's what they deserve. I hope they see one day how wrong they were, how much they made everything so difficult for me," Beau carried on, his voice like a piece of hard flint.

"Stop," Will begged. "Please don't read anymore."

"I think I have some sort of power. I've been doing things," Daphne started, taking the book from his dad. "Things I don't mean to do. I set Daphne's chairs on fire, made a girl fall down

the stairs and break her legs, made Daphne's stupid fucking plates all break. I think I even caused Tommy to crash his car. I don't know how, but all this anger inside of me is causing this somehow. Maybe I did die in the hospital when I tried to commit suicide, and I came back with abilities."

"I'm sorry," Will blurted out, out of instinct, before he could stop himself.

Always sorry. Always apologising for things he hadn't done, things that he didn't need to say sorry for.

"Do you know what you've confessed to, Will?" Daphne hissed. "You confessed to working with the Devil - these things you've done, they're evil! They're gonna get you sent to Hell!"

"I didn't mean any of it," Will insisted, lying.

"What are we supposed to do?" Beau demanded. "How could you say all that about us, after *everything* we've done for you?"

Will blinked, and something snapped in him then. "After everything you've done?"

Beau rose from the sofa. "We've given you so much. Time and time again. Put up with all this *nonsense* , for years now, Will. We're sick of it."

"Then I'll go," Will retorted suddenly, unsure of where this was coming from. "I'll leave."

Beau's face was a look of pure shock. "What the hell are you talking about?"

"You'll be better off without me," Will stated, swallowing. "I'll get out of your hair, leave the house, go live somewhere else. I'm sure that will make you both much happier."

With that, he scrambled upstairs to his room, Beau hot on his tail. Will tried to shut the door, leaning himself against it to keep it closed, but his father was a fully grown man and Will was… well, he was just a scrawny sixteen year old boy. Beau burst the door open, sending Will stumbling back. They stared wide eyed at each other for a split second before Will grabbed one of his back packs and started seizing clothes from the suitcase he had to keep everything in anyway, Daphne's clothes overflowing from his closet.

"Where the hell you gonna go, huh?" Beau yelled. "Sleep out on the streets like some vagrant? Run back to Tommy's house? Cause he sure as hell don't want you!"

"And you don't want me either!" Will screamed, spinning to face his father. "You never have!"

"You're making this more difficult than it needs to be, Will! You better go down there and apologise to Daphne for what you've done!"

"What, like you made me do when I was fourteen and I apparently ruined your relationship? Huh? Will that make you both happy if I grovel and beg a little?!"

"You've been given everything!" Beau roared, his lip curled.

Will shoved the last of what he could fit into his bag, pocketing his wallet. “I’m leaving. That’s what she wants - she doesn’t want me to beg and apologise and self-fucking-flagellate myself. She’s been pushing me out for years, and now she gets to have you all to herself! Well done, Daphne!”

He screamed the last part as loud as he could, hoping the bitch could hear him downstairs.

“You know what?” Beau seethed, “good. Go. Leave us, Will. It *will* be better. Means we’ll have more room for the new baby.”

Will froze. “What? Daphne’s pregnant?”

“No, but we’re trying,” Beau answered, sticking his chin out in defiance. “We want a kid of our own. Children are a blessing, and we deserve to have what God intended us to have as man and wife.”

Will nearly laughed, but the rage, the shock, took precedent over the mean sneer he wanted to release. “You can’t be serious?”

“We’re going to have a baby, Will, whether you like it or not.”

“You’ll fuck it up,” Will bit at him, face twisted in anger. “Just like you fucked up with me. Like you’ve fucked up with Daxton and Levi. It’s only a matter of time until CPS comes knocking to put those boys with a better family.”

Beau did hit him then; he’d never struck Will in his life, and the shock of it sent Will reeling back towards his bed. He felt like he’d had the air knocked out of his lungs, and his head spun.

He shakily stood up straight again, letting out a small noise of disbelief when he touched his mouth to find his lower lip split and bleeding. He darted forwards, shoving past Beau. When he reached the bottom of the stairs back into the living room, he froze on the last step to find Daphne *grinning* at him.

“I hope you’re fuckin’ happy, Daphne,” Will spat at her, staggering forwards to the front door.

“Evil, conniving little shit!” she screamed behind him.

He couldn’t help it. The rage, the sheer hurt inside of him, burst forth like a hurtling avalanche. He whipped around and felt it take over him, felt his mind contort and twist under the strange sensation inside of him that was thicker than feelings, more than just an emotion, morphing and bending into something he could only describe as *other* . Was this the same thing that had been with him since he’d tried to kill himself? The same strange *something* that had awoken within him?

Daphne’s spine went rigid, and her body bowed off the sofa. Will’s mind went quiet as she slowly raised from the sofa into the air, limbs angling all the wrong ways and her mouth falling open in a scream.

Beau thundered down the stairs to find his wife crumpling like a piece of paper in thin air, and Will's eyes turning to black as he stood watching, chest heaving. He was *doing* this to her somehow.

"Will, stop!" He cried out, running to Daphne, trying to grab her.

Will's hold on her snapped like a cut string on a balloon, and she crumpled to the floor in a heap. She gasped out, moaning and sobbing as Beau fell to his knees beside her, cradling her to him.

"Witch," she rasped, her breath stuck in her throat. "Whore of Satan! You're a fucking witch!"

"Get out! Just get the fuck out and don't come back!" Beau screeched, his voice breaking.

Will found himself stumbling out the front door and onto the street, unable to breathe, unable to *think* . He looked up at the windows at the front of the house and saw Levi and Daxton's fear stricken faces peering down at him from their shared bedroom.

Will turned and ran. He didn't look back.

Six

Chapter Notes

Deuteronomy 18:10-11
There shall not be found among you any one who burns his son or his daughter as an offering, any one who practises divination, a soothsayer, or an augur, or a sorcerer, or a charmer, or a medium, or a wizard, or a necromancer.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

New Orleans, Louisiana, 22 years ago

It took Will nearly five days to get to New Orleans. He slept at the bus station in Lafayette the night he ran away, cowering in the shadows and questioning every decision he'd ever made.

The next morning he bought a ticket to Baton Rouge with the twenty dollars his dad had placed inside his birthday card. He lingered there for two more nights, skulking around the bus station, rationing his spare change on sandwiches from convenience stores, and drinking water from gas station rest rooms. He took a cheap overnight Greyhound to New Orleans from Baton Rouge with the last few dollars he had, and woke up in Crescent City.

He had no plan, no idea what on earth he was going to do. He wandered aimlessly, wide-eyed and terrified at first, but quickly became enthralled with the smells, the noises, the energy thrumming through the streets around him despite his less than favourable circumstances. He eventually found Covenant House, a Christian youth shelter that took in runaways, homeless kids and those with nowhere left to go.

He stayed two nights and then left once he'd eaten a few proper meals and slept in an actual bed for the first time in days.

He wasn't sure how she found him. It was like they were two celestial bodies, pulled in closer and closer to each other until he became acutely aware that he was gravitating towards someone, spinning closer and closer, until he *felt* her presence right across from him one night as he sat on a park bench in Jackson Square, gazing up at the looming architecture of St. Louis Cathedral. He'd stayed inside the Cathedral until it had shut, lighting candle after candle and praying, pleading, with all his might that God would hear him. That God would save him, help him somehow in the chaos he had created for himself. He knelt before the statue of the Virgin Mary, whispering decade after decade of Sorrowful Mysteries until his throat began to hurt, his fingers numb as they slid over the beads of his rosary.

She appeared as if from the very shadows herself, her eyes almost seeming to glow beneath the streetlights surrounding the park and the cathedral. She crossed the road towards him, her eyes pinning him motionless to the bench he sat on in an almost predator-like gaze.

She was beautiful; her age indecipherable, anywhere from her early thirties to her late forties for all Will knew. She was tiny, barely more than five feet, but she carried herself as if she took up every inch of the air around them. She was wraithlike at first, seeming to float before him, and he wondered if she was real or if he was truly losing his mind. But she drew closer, and Will let his eyes drink in the sight of her olive skin, bronzed and luminous in the night. Her jaw and cheekbones were sharp, full lips parting to reveal brilliant white teeth. The prominent bridge of her aquiline nose only made her more attractive, and her eyes… her big, almond eyes reminded Will of seaweed and kelp, shockingly green even in the dimming light.

She tossed her loose hair over her shoulder, tumbling waves of glossy black curls. Her body was lithe, and he wondered if she was a ballerina; she certainly held her poise as if she was.

“Hello, Will.”

His face immediately twisted, wishing he could sink into the bench and vanish. “Gonna explain how you know my name?”

Her smile split across her face like a crack of lightning, brilliant and terrifying at the same time. Her voice was heavily accented, a strange mix of Latina and something else - Caribbean, maybe?

“Our Lady revealed your name to me many nights ago, now. I’ve been waiting for you.”

Will slowly shook his head. “You must have me mixed up with someone else. I’m sorry, I can’t help you.”

She stepped closer until she was right before him, bending slightly at the waist to look him right in the eyes until their eyes were locked and their faces were inches apart. Will felt like he was falling into the fathomless green pools in her sockets, mesmerised. He *felt* her again, felt something rippling through him. Felt that strange well of energy, of power, fluttering in his chest, in his stomach, his breath picking up and his heart beginning to thud quicker.

“Who are you?” he gritted out.

She swept a hand across his hair, to brush the curls away from his forehead, cradling his face gently. “Magdalena.”

“Are you…are you…?”

Will couldn’t get the words out.

“Like you? She offered, raising a perfectly arched brow. “Yes, mi pequeña polilla.”

Will’s face scrunched up. “Did you just call me a *moth* ?”

She grinned widely again, straightening up, clasping her hands behind her back. “You sit here, in the dark, basking under the street light around you like you never have and never will feel the sun. A creature who would throw himself into the fire, desire overriding survival.”

Will felt like she’d torn strips off of him down to the bone, disarmed him with a few strange words that felt like a dagger between his ribs. “Who *are* you?”

Her head tilted slightly, green eyes glimmering in the dark. Wordlessly, she raised her left hand and then swiftly slashed the blade-sharp pointed end of one of her rings on her right hand across her palm. It cut through her skin immediately, blood seeping down her wrist and disappearing into the black folds of the long sleeved dress she wore.

Will jerked backwards. “What the fuck are you doing?!”

She glanced at the cut, and Will watched in disbelief as the cut closed up within seconds, the blood ceasing to spill. She dragged the flat of her tongue over her palm, licking away her own blood. It left a slight smear of crimson over the nutmeg bronze skin on her chin.

“Are you a vampire?” Will whispered in horror, fear sliding down his bones.

She tipped her head back and *laughed* , the noise reverberating around them. “Oh, Will, no, no. I am not a *vampira* . I am a witch, like you.”

“I’m *not* - ”

She tutted fiercely, cutting him off. “Let us not deny our situation, pequeña polilla. The very *air* around you vibrates with your power. You feel it around me too, yes?”

And he did. But he didn’t want to admit that.

She sighed. “It’s alright. I know you are scared. The first few months are hard, confusing, especially when you have no one to guide you, to tell you how to live with what you have been blessed with.”

Anger roiled inside of him at this stranger, at this bizarre woman who was sending his mind racing. “I have been blessed with *nothing* .”

Her eyes blazed with her fury then, and he felt it singe his skin as she bared her teeth. “You have been given a gift, Will. A God-given gift, something that sets you aside from the rest of the damned souls that walk this Earth. You have a lot to learn, but do not cast aside what others would *kill* to have.”

“I don’t want it!” Will hissed. “None of it makes sense! I spent my whole life normal, inconsequential, and then last year I woke up and it was just *there* , inside of me like some sort of parasite! I can’t control it! All it’s done is cause chaos and hurt other people!”

Magdalena’s smile reappeared, wide and stunning. “I have seen it, in my dreams. In my meditations. I have seen how potent it is already.”

“Teach me how to get rid of it,” Will demanded, hurtling to his feet and towering over her. “How do I remove it?”

The slap came from nowhere, her palm striking across his cheek in a flash. He spluttered in surprise, hand flying up to hold the cheek she had cradled moments before. And then the sting, the pain, was gone in a flash, as she waved her hand as if brushing away a fly.

“You must live with it,” she hissed. “The pain is gone, yes?”

“Y-yes,” he breathed, frozen and wide eyed, still clutching his cheek.

“Witches have affinities for all sorts. My magic lets me heal, lets me mend and take away the hurt. I could cut your throat and have your skin knit back together before you bleed out, all night, until the moon rises and falls, until the sun comes again,” she said softly, quietly. “What does your magic let you do, Will?”

“It destroys,” Will whispered. “It wreaks havoc.”

“How exciting,” she smiled devilishly, as if it thrilled her. “I’ll enjoy teaching you.”

“ *Teaching* me?” Will repeated, dumbfounded.

Magdalena shut her eyes, groaning. “Madre de Dios, dame fuerzas. Dime que el niño no es tonto.”

Will flinched.

“ *Yes* , Will, teach you. Our Lady has been guiding me for months now, preparing me for your arrival. You will be my Ward. I am to teach you, guide you, help you learn your magic.”

“I don’t understand,” Will mumbled, fidgeting.

She grasped his hand, stroking her thin fingers over his knuckles. “You tried to kill yourself. The experience woke up your magic, the power in you. You have been drifting, listlessly, through your life since you were a little boy. Unloved, unwanted. Your mother was not capable of loving you and your father is a childish, selfish fool. You have a *rage* inside of you that has festered into something so dark you spend every waking moment terrified that it is going to consume you.”

Will opened his mouth to speak, but she pressed a finger to his lips, shutting him up.

“I know all of this, Will, because I have *seen* it. We are gifted with Sight, all of us. Each and every witch is a Seer in his or her own way. And I, dear child, have seen down into your *soul* . I know you, Will. I know you.”

The tears came from nowhere, and before he knew it, he was crumpled in this tiny woman’s arms, sobbing in the street lights beneath the St. Louis Cathedral.

“Come. Come, now, mi pequeña polilla. Let’s go home.”

New Orleans, Louisiana, 20 years ago

"Again."

"Magdalena, I'm *tired* , can't we just - "

An ancient, dusty Grimoire clipped him across the back of the head, as fast as lighting.

"Jesus Mags, do you have to - "

Another swat across the back of the head, harder this time.

"You can take a break when you send her back," Magdalena snapped.

Will groaned, slumping where he sat cross legged on the wooden floorboards of Magdalena's library, the spirit in front of him wailing and weeping.

Will had gone home with Magdalena that night two years ago, and had not left since. He now lived with her in the white French Colonial that was far too big for the two of them, never mind Magdalena on her own, coexisting with the other witch in a strange dynamic. They were not quite parent and child, mother and son. They bickered like lovers sometimes, despite the fact no romantic love existed between them. She pushed him and challenged him, forcing him to confront his magic constantly. He'd learnt so much from her in the past two years, soaking up every bit of information he could from her. They loved each other, he knew that much - not romantically, sexually, but like two souls who had been wandering the earth countless lifetimes over searching for one another.

They completed each other in a platonic kind of way. The kind of love Will had come to learn called Storge, or Philia.

The first night in the old plantation house, Will had woken in the early hours screaming. His new bedroom had been flooded with bodies, gaping mouths and sunken eyes, transparent skin stretching over bones that crawled towards him. Magdalena had run to him, bursting into the room to find Will all alone, scrambling backwards on the bed and sobbing.

"Help me!" he pleaded. "Make them leave, Magdalena, please!"

"Will, there is no one *here* ," she hissed, head whipping around.

"They're everywhere," he sobbed, burying his face in a pillow. "The Dead! The Dead, they're here!"

Magdalena's face fell when he looked back up at her, a look of horror and awe on her face. She'd lowered herself gently into bed with him, holding him loosely in her arms and rocking him.

"They can't hurt you, little moth."

"Why can't you see them?" he croaked into her neck. "Why are they *here* ?"

“It is not my power to see them like you” she hushed him, stroking his curls. “They are drawn to you because of your magic.”

“What the fuck is it?” Will asked through clenched teeth, fear and rage making him cry harder. “What *am* I?”

“So few of us can see the dead. You are a dying breed, Will. A Necromancer.”

“Necromancers don’t exist anymore,” Will insisted. “They were outlawed, all executed.”

“Nothing is ever truly erased for good. Energy can never be destroyed, no? It must always appear again, existing in a circle like time itself. Just because the witches who held this power were eradicated, does not mean the power itself died out.”

Magdalena had not let him run from his power, which had truly awakened once he had found himself in her presence. It was as if she had lit a spark inside of him, and he now held a fire within him that could never be extinguished.

She was, however, ruthless. Hours and days of gruelling practice that left Will burnt out, near hysterical some nights. He spent every moment reading, learning. Ancient tome after ancient tome, books written in old dead languages she insisted he learned. Volumes on the history of their kind, every scrap of documentation to be absorbed and memorised by heart. When he wasn’t reading, he was drawing runes from memory, reciting incantations and spells. He learnt how to conduct rituals and brew poultices and concoctions of all manners, learning quickly just how much nightshade was lethal after Magdalena forced him to try every potion- hours spent retching into the porcelain bowl of the toilet were a quick and cruel teacher.

He learnt how to cast magic circles, how to draw from the power within and evoke and summon the dead. That had been the hardest part - not the actual *use* of his magic, but how to control it. It flowed to him like a streaming faucet, gushing out of him in ungovernable torrents, which made him feel euphoria like he’d never known. But the hard part was turning it *off* .

Like now, for instance.

“Will, this poor wretch cannot stay here,” Magdalena snapped. “You must send her back.”

“I will, I just find it difficult!” he snapped back, glowering at the ghost before him.

“You let your magic burst forth like a wave breaking on the shore, wrecking the ships afloat on it - it will maim and destroy anything in its path if you do not control it. You cannot let it consume you.”

And it nearly did, every time. Will’s power was so immense that sometimes he felt near to blacking out, to letting it take hold of him and *become* him, possess his mental faculties and control his every move, every thought. It was delicious. Dark and hot and sweet, and his very blood sang with it every time he called on his magic. When it really took hold of him, in those moments that had been dangerous, his eyes pooled with darkness, like ink spilling across his sclera. It made him look demonic.

Will grunted with the strain of releasing the spirit back to the Netherworld. His power only wanted to call forth more souls, to rip apart the fabric of existence and birth every dead soul, every wandering spirit in the Netherworld back into the world of the living.

The terrifying thing was, he knew he was capable of such a thing. Of cracking open the very gates to the Underworld, to the Netherworld, and slicing open the border that separated the dead and the living like a knife splitting flesh.

Somehow, he managed to clamp down on it, his head spinning with the pressure of getting his magic to do the reverse of what it really wanted. He gritted out the spell, muttering incantations in a hoarse voice as he released the soul of the woman back to the Netherworld. She slowly faded from them, like dust on the wind, until she vanished completely.

“Ah! Not yet!” Magdalena ordered him as she saw him slump back. “The circle is not closed. You know you cannot leave it open.”

“Fuck the circle,” Will gritted out, wiping the back of his hand across his upper lip where his nose had started bleeding.

His magic did so love to make him bleed from different orifices; his ears, his mouth, his eyes, his nose, sometimes even sweating blood.

“Fuck the circle?” Magdalena dead panned. “Did I hear you correctly, little moth? *Fuck the circle* ?”

“It won’t make a difference!” Will groaned. “The spirit is gone, I sent her back! What does it matter? I’m *tired* Magdalena, I don’t have the energy to close the fucking circle!”

“If you leave this open, Will, you know what you tempt,” she snarled, eyes blazing. “Horrors that are not meant for this world will slither through the cracks, grip you in the night and - ”

“So what? So what if a demon could slip through?” Will snarked at her.

She grabbed him by the shoulders from where she had been kneeling outside the circle behind him, placing her lips to his ear as she squeezed his thin arms. “Listen to me carefully, because I will only tell you this once. You are blessed and gifted with a power that can either be wielded with care, with *knowledge* , or you can let it destroy and devastate. The choice is yours. But you must remember, little moth, that just because you can let evil walk this earth, does not mean you should.”

“I don’t see how - ”

“Death,” she hissed, “is not a game, Will. It is not child’s play. I am sorry you have never had the chance to be a child. That you have always been burdened with more responsibility than is fair for a boy so young as you. But you must handle this magic, train it like the beast it is, or else it will end you.”

“My magic wouldn’t harm me,” Will retorted. “It wouldn’t let something evil hurt me, let me be possessed by a demon.”

“How do you know?” she laughed darkly. “How can you be sure of that? Your magic is dark by its very nature, Will. It is never satisfied, never sated. It hungers for more, always; it wants to revel in the demolition it is capable of. It is *starving* for destruction, unless you learn to control it. Unless you close the *fucking circle.* ”

With that she shoved him forwards angrily. He turned and glowered at her, fists shaking.

The look she gave him made him wince, so he turned his back to her and forced himself, drained as he was, to close the circle. He pushed himself to grate out the closing invocation, to shakily draw in chalk the sealing rune overlapped with the rune of protection she had taught him on the floorboards.

When he crawled over the circle of salt after, she stood over him, eyes dark and threatening.

“It tempts you, Will. I know. But you must resist it, not let it seduce you.”

He’d ignored her, dragging himself back to bed with the little energy he had left.

Time passed strangely at the old plantation house. Hours would feel like days sometimes, and weeks blurred by like minutes. Will found himself healing in leaping stretches and crawling seasons. He missed his mother like a phantom limb. He missed his father, despite how things had ended.

Neither Daphne nor Beau had once called him, no matter how hard he stared at the cell phone every night, willing his father to just *care* . To ask how he was. To love him.

And then the idea came to him, one day.

What if someone *could* love him? Not the way he knew Magdalena loved him, with that ferocious protectiveness she had over him, but in the warm and soft way he’d wished his mother always had.

He wanted to be cherished, *held* .

And maybe now she was dead, Josephine could love him? Maybe in the afterlife, she had realised she did in fact care for her only child. And Will? Will would take it. Will would take *anything* . He’d take the briefest smile, the flutter of affection in her dead eyes. He would take the see-through, mist like apparition of his mother passing through his skin. Anything to just see her one last time.

So he plotted and planned in secret. When Magdalena was gone from the house, out on visits to homes and shelters to use her gift of healing magic, Will devoted every spare minute to preparing. He raked through Grimoires, tore through pages of spell books, learning everything he could about summoning dead relatives. For the last two years Magdalena had been guiding him through basic evocation, simple seances to merely call the nearest spirit to him. He had never fine tuned his power before into a single focus, to be able to summon someone specifically.

But determination had seeped into his bones, threaded through his very marrow, and he decided nothing was going to stop him from trying to summon his dead mother’s spirit.

Chapter End Notes

mi pequeña polilla - my little moth
Madre de Dios, dame fuerzas. Dime que el niño no es tonto - Mother of God, give me strength. Tell me the boy is not stupid.

Hey guys! Thank you so much for all the love, I appreciate you all so much. This will be my last chapter for a couple of weeks as I'm away travelling until the end of August, but wanted to leave with you with a chapter to tide you over for a while!

The next chapter will see team sassy science figuring out what the f to do now they know there's a demon on the loose :) oh, and Will realises Hannibal is hot and then has a crisis over what to do with those feelings?

Seven

Chapter Notes

Psalm 119:35
Lead me in the path of thy commandments,
for I delight in it.

Hannibal watched Will drift back to sleep on the sofa after finishing the light dinner he'd prepared for him, his skin still pale and washed out from the events of the day. The look that had appeared on Will's face as he'd blearily gazed up at Hannibal from the ground lingered behind Hannibal's eyes every time he blinked; Will, sobbing on the floor of the lab in the salt circle, blood seeping from his nose and ears as he shuddered with the effort to even lift his head.

Hannibal had felt it radiating from within the circle - the pull from the Netherworld. How desperately it had wanted to claw Will back to it, and how the light in Will's vibrant blue eyes had faded so solemnly as he prepared to relinquish himself to it.

Even now, as he sat in Will's eccentric, pieced together living room, he could see the shadow of Death lingering over Will's sleeping form.

It made Hannibal wonder why Will had been willing to risk performing the ritual in the first place. Hannibal had read more than his fair share of accounts of this ritual, ancient writings from thousands of years ago documented by Necromancers long past, when the world had embraced magic in all of its forms. But even those archaic texts had documented what Will had done today as dangerous and taboo - every account that Hannibal had poured over in his lifetime had written of how the Necromancer who had died to enter the Netherworld and returned hadn't been able to resist Death as it pulled them back into its arms.

What Will had done today was not impossible - it had been done before, many millennia ago. But by all accounts, his survival of the ritual should have been inconceivable.

And yet, Hannibal watched with his own two eyes as Will's chest rose and fell underneath the blanket he'd draped over the witch, observed how Will's fingers twitched against the fabric, the black runes on his knuckles contorting with each small, unconscious movement.

Hannibal rose from his seat, looking around the living room. It was a large, open space that Will had managed to turn into a den of nooks and crannies, walls filled with shelves that were overflowing with books and papers of all shapes and sizes. Armchairs and sofas, coffee tables, tropical plants that nearly reached the height of the tall ceiling were all spaced around the room to make it feel like a handful of separate, smaller rooms. Where the walls were not covered with book shelves, framed paintings hung, ranging from dramatic stormy landscapes

to portraits of numerous women with tumbling black hair and wicked gleams in their eyes - Hannibal frowned at these portraits. None bore resemblance to Will, and yet they seemed to be ancestral portraits, spanning years of women who all clearly shared a bloodline.

He came across the blank space where a small portrait had once hung, the wallpaper beneath it brighter and cleaner, its oval frame obviously removed. Who's painting had been removed from this line of women? And *why* ?

Hannibal's lips quirked at the sight of one very empty shelf along the rows of bookshelves that had a thick glass panel over the front of it and seemingly no way to open or remove the panel - it was spelled with magic, and if Hannibal had learned anything about Will in the last few days, he'd bet his life on it that glass would only disappear under Will's touch. It was probably spelled with blood.

Behind the glass panel, propped up on a stand, was a tall, slim Grimoire that was wrapped in thick iron chains and padlocks.

Hannibal's mouth watered at the sight of it, and knew of at least a dozen of his fellow academics and professors who'd probably slit Will's throat just to get their hands on it. He reached out his fingertips to trace them over the glass, wincing when he felt his flesh erupt into burning pain that blistered up the very bones of his hand. And yet, when he looked down, he saw no marks, no burns or cuts. He turned to look back at the witch on the sofa, only to startle when he saw a black cat sauntering along the back of the sofa, stopping to perch by Will's head.

It observed Hannibal with slitted amber eyes, its sleek fur shining underneath the glow of a nearby lamp. There was an intelligence behind those eyes that had him locked in place, stuck in a staring contest with the creature. Hannibal shook his head and sighed, stepping away from the shelves and clasping his hands behind him as he wandered out of the living room into the dimly lit hallway. He eyed the staircase curiously, wandering what lay hidden upstairs in the witch's home.

He felt a strange pull to the upper level of the house, an odd energy beckoning him up the stairs. It felt as if something was calling to him. The moment he set his foot on the first step, a giant, hissing creature from the shadows of the upper stairs lunged for him.

Hannibal stumbled back, drawing a sharp breath, only to knock straight into the hard, firm body he knew belonged to Will. Will, who did not move a muscle, eyes boring into Hannibal's silently as the older man turned to look at the witch. He hadn't even heard Will approach.

Hannibal opened his mouth to say something, and then froze as he felt a cool, smooth body begin to wrap around his pant leg.

He slowly looked down to see the thing that had sprung at him from the shadows. A four foot long, venomous black cottonmouth snake crept up his leg, its tongue flickering out as its heavy body climbed Hannibal like a tree trunk, dark scales gleaming in the limited lighting of the hallway.

“I’d prefer if you didn’t go up there, Hannibal,” Will said softly.

There was something dark and predatory in his voice that had Hannibal drawing his gaze away from the giant snake coiling around him to look at the witch in front of him. He swallowed, then smiled tightly.

“My apologies,” he uttered sincerely. “I don’t know what came over me.”

Will quirked a brow, pursing his lips. “Oh, sure. Nothing to do with the curiosity of what does the freaky hermit witch have hiding upstairs in his haunted house.”

Hannibal couldn’t help but smile at Will’s dry sarcasm. “I suppose I have been caught.”

Will’s eyes slid to the enormous viper sliding up Hannibal’s hip and then back to Hannibal’s gaze. “Looks like it.”

“May I ask why you have a large venomous snake guarding your staircase?” Hannibal asked, voice strained a little as he felt the snake’s head bump against his abdomen.

Will extended a hand and the snake immediately turned to him, reaching for his hand beginning to coil around the younger man’s arm as it transferred its body from Hannibal to Will.

“She’s free to roam where she wants.”

It was Hannibal’s turn to raise a brow this time. “Sounds perfectly…safe.”

“Eesha would have bitten you by now if she wanted to,” Will informed him, turning and heading back to the living room with the snake resting around his shoulders. “The fact she hasn’t must mean she likes you - she’s not so fond of strangers.”

“Eesha?”

“Yes. That’s her name,” Will sighed, “she’s my Familiar.”

Hannibal stilled, eyeing the snake with renewed interest. “You didn’t mention you have a Familiar. How long has she been with you?”

Will settled into the armchair Hannibal had been sitting in, letting the huge cottonmouth coil into a tight, content ball in his lap. Her head rested over the rolls of her body, eyes and flickering tongue directed at Hannibal as he sat opposite Will on the sofa the witch had been dozing on the entire evening. He watched as Will gently stroked two fingers over her head, sliding down the length of her curled body.

“She came to me around twenty-one years ago, when I was seventeen,” Will answered eventually, meeting Hannibal’s stare.

“A long lifespan for a snake.”

“Our life forces are entwined. She will live for as long as I do,” Will answered simply, shrugging and lifting his tattooed hand as the cottonmouth stirred and began to slither for the floor.

“And the cat?”

Will’s jaw hardened at the mere mention of the animal. “Miguel.”

Hannibal smiled. “An amusing name for a cat. He’s your Familiar too?”

Will went very still and very quiet, his eyes boring holes into the floor as said cat appeared from behind the armchair and approached the snake as it made its way across the floor board. The cat *purred* and bumped his head affectionately against the scaled body of the snake as it disappeared into a shadowed corner of the living room.

“No. He’s not my Familiar,” Will answered carefully, his voice guarded and sounding strange.

Hannibal frowned. “A pet, then?”

“Miguel is not a pet,” Will gritted out, rubbing his inked fingers along his jaw and refusing to meet Hannibal’s eyes. “He was the Familiar of another witch I knew. I look after him now.”

Hannibal was immediately fascinated by Will’s stiffness, his clipped words. He hungered for even the smallest insight into Will’s heavily guarded, very private life. “A friend of yours? What happened to them?”

Will looked over at the older man finally, wanting to snarl at him, but catching himself wordless as he drank in the image of the professor. His usually pristine hair had fallen loose from its style, stray strands brushing against his forehead. His cheekbones looked sharp enough to cut flesh upon, harsh shadows playing around his jaw. Will’s eyes glazed over as he imagined blood dripping along the planes of Hannibal’s face for a split second, snapping himself out of it.

But it was Hannibal’s eyes that caught his breath in his throat - he was looking at Will as if he had stumbled across his own personal Holy Grail, something legendary and fabled. He drank Will down in those amber eyes of his like he had never seen anything so precious or rare before, and Will would be a liar if he said those intense eyes didn’t stir something in his gut, didn’t make his heart beat just a little bit faster.

Oh , Will realised, his stomach plummeting. Oh *God.* Will couldn’t - he could *not* - actually, truly find this man attractive. There was no way he was flushing under the older man’s gaze, impossible that he -

“Will?”

His name, uttered so softly into the air between them. Like a prayer. Like an incantation. Like a *spell* .

“They were…” Will trailed off, blinking rapidly.

How did he put into words what Magdalena was to him?

“She was everything,” Will whispered, his chest constricting in that familiar way whenever he thought about her.

Hannibal’s face smoothed out, unreadable and blank. “I’m sorry. What happened to her?”

Will’s smile was bitter, broken and twisted, and his eyes filled with tears. “I did.”

“Well, do you have any better suggestions?!” Bev snapped at Zeller, her patience running thin. “There’s nothing, Zeller! No footage, no security cameras that picked them up, door to door calls came up with fuck all!”

“What, and you think going and knocking on the door of a coven is going to be a piece of cake?” Zeller retorted, glowering at her. “Like those witches will give up one of their own if there is anyone who’s gone rogue!”

“Enough,” Jack barked out, silencing the bickering. “Beverly has a point, Zeller. We’re scratching around in the dust and coming up with thin air. Our killer is more powerful than we first thought if he has the ability to interfere with technology and wipe any security footage of him breaking and entering all these homes. Maybe interviewing the coven will help.”

Zeller said nothing, nostrils flaring as he turned away from the conversation.

The team had received back the report from the tech assistant who’d been assigned the laborious job of trawling through hours of footage on doorbell cameras and street cameras, only to find there had been malfunctions resulting in blackouts in *every* device hours before and after all the murders.

Will had taken one look at it and given them a grim look. “Well, he’s either a talented hacker who can simultaneously take down multiple live feeds and erase them, or he used his magic to interfere with the footage.”

Beverly had then suggested interviewing the coven.

“Will - surely you could - ”

“No. Nope. Absolutely not. I’m having nothing to do with this idea of yours.”

“But aren’t you at least, I don’t know, *acquaintances* with the coven?” Jimmy queried, frowning.

Will rounded on him, a vicious glint in his eyes. “What, you think we all get together to jump on our broomsticks and stir our cauldrons together under the full moon?”

“I never said that!”

“Just because I’m a witch, and they are witches, does not mean I want anything to do with them.”

“Well, there’s a fucking surprise,” Zeller grumbled under his breath. “Will, not wanting to interact with people? Never would have guessed it.”

Will shot him a deadly glare.

“The coven may refuse to meet with us,” Hannibal interjected diplomatically, sipping on the coffee he’d brought with him to the headquarters.

Will got up and began to pace the small office, hands clasped behind his back.

“Why would they refuse?” Jack asked, frown creasing his already furrowed brow. “Do they think they’re above the law?”

Will scoffed quietly as he stood in front of his evidence board, pictures and articles and photocopied autopsy reports pinned to the surface. Jack sent him a withering look, but ignored him.

“Covens are… secretive, at the best of times,” Hannibal replied carefully. “History has made them wary of sharing too much with the general populace.”

Jack grunted. “But I bet you had no problem getting an audience with covens in the past. I’ve read your publication on the coven you lived with for six months in Estonia.”

Hannibal merely smiled politely.

“Even if you manage to speak to them, there’s no telling whether they’ll be truthful with you,” Will cut in, looking over his shoulder at the rest of them.

He caught Hannibal’s gaze and nearly choked on his own breath as he saw the professor’s eyes blatantly raking over Will’s back from head to toe, lingering far too long to be deemed appropriate over his ass. He quickly turned and looked back at his board, blushing.

“If they’re lying, they risk being arrested themselves,” Jimmy pointed out. “If they’re covering for whoever is doing this…”

Will shook his head. “There are witches in that coven who can make lies seem like truth. Make you forget your train of thought, make you confused about what you’re even asking them.”

“Oh, so you *do* know them,” Zeller sneered.

Will’s shoulders stiffened, but he didn’t turn to look at him. “I never said I didn’t.”

“All witches must be registered within a coven,” Hannibal murmured. “There is only one in New Orleans, yes?”

Will nodded curtly.

“So you - wait - so not only do you *know* this coven, you’re a part of it?” Jimmy asked, confusion marring his face. “Why haven’t you ever mentioned them before? They’re practically like family, right?”

Hannibal studied Will carefully, taking in the disgusted look on Will’s face that he realised was merely an act; beneath that contempt lay deep rooted hurt in his eyes. Hannibal had wondered the same as Jimmy - most witches lived within close proximity to each other, if not altogether under one roof as a coven. Covens all over the globe had become a practical necessity for witches, providing safety in numbers, a safe place for witches to exist when the outside world shunned them and inflicted cruel and punishing laws on magic.

And yet, their witch was entirely alone, isolated in an old plantation home that was far too big for just one lone Necromancer.

Why *wasn’t* Will closer to his coven?

“Well, that solves everything then,” Jack said simply, clasping his hands together on top of the pile of evidence files on the table. “Will can contact them and let them know we’re coming so we can interview them, poke around and see if there are any members that have been acting strangely or have left the coven.”

Will remained silent, not turning around to look at Jack. Not looking at anyone.

“Will? You good with that?” Bev asked warily, watching him.

“I… no, not particularly,” came the dry response from the witch. “We’re not exactly on good terms.”

Jack rolled his eyes. “Why doesn’t that surprise me?”

Will turned fully then, drifting back to the table. The shirt he wore today was a faded cotton navy button up, the sleeves rolled up to his elbows and revealing stark black tattoos against his pale skin. Hannibal studied the interconnected loops of thick circles tattooed in a row along Will’s inner left forearm, the ink covering up what Hannibal realised was an old, jagged scar that ran vertically up Will’s arm, right along where his veins were. The savage nature of the scar, the depth of it as it flexed beneath the tattoos… surely Will had nearly bled to death from such a deep wound?

“Jack, it’s not as simple as calling them up and letting them know I’m swinging by,” Will began cautiously, a nervous tick flexing in his jaw. “When I said we’re not on good terms, I’m putting it lightly. Last time I saw them they exiled me from the coven.”

Jack’s eyebrows shot up towards his hairline, and Hannibal went stiff in his seat.

“Exiled?” Jack repeated. “ *How* ?”

Will’s nervous face closed off once more, the defensive look of distaste returning that Hannibal knew was a ruse. “Well, they were very democratic about it. All wrote down their vote on a piece of parchment and burnt it in an offering to the founding ancestors of the New

Orleans coven, and even the ancestors agreed I should be kicked out. White flames meant yes, Will can stay. Black flames meant no, get rid of him. That fire was fucking pitch black."

"What did you do to be exiled?" Hannibal asked slowly. "It is… well, it is unheard of for a coven to exile one of their own, especially in this day and age."

Will's head tipped back, blinking at the fluorescent office lights above them. "I broke the one law that all witches are sworn to live by. I broke the balance."

"He's not making any fucking sense," Zeller grumbled. "Stop speaking in riddles, Will."

"Let me dumb it down for you then, seeing as you've not bothered to learn a *single* fucking thing about witches or magic since we started working together," Will snarled, glaring at him without a shred of patience. "I performed a spell that was forbidden when I was much, much younger. I was warned repeatedly not to, that I was absolutely prohibited from attempting it, because it broke the laws of nature and broke the universal balance of magic I am sworn to maintain. Someone died as a result of what I did, another member of the coven. So, I was exiled."

The room went quiet and the air thickened with tension so thick Will started to feel like he was suffocating, choking on it.

"What was the spell?" Beverly asked quietly.

Will's lip curled and he turned to look away from her, refusing to answer. Hannibal couldn't help himself, however.

"You tried to bring someone back to life," Hannibal murmured softly, eyes widening in awe and shock. "Who?"

"We're done," Will suddenly snarled, on his feet in a flash and heading for the door. "Contact the fucking coven yourselves. They won't answer me anyway."

The door slammed loudly behind him. A wind tore through the room from nowhere, sending papers flying everywhere, the lights flickering overhead and thrumming with electricity as they buzzed and twitched on and off before returning to stasis.

Jimmy looked up. "Well, that one's new. Last time he had a temper tantrum he set Zeller's lab coat on fire."

"So that went horribly," Beverly sighed, head in her hands. "The coven was our next best shot."

Hannibal cleared his throat, smiling pleasantly. "Leave it with me. I may be able to get an audience with them."

Jack clapped him on the shoulder as he rose, beaming. "I knew there was a reason we got you on the team. Now, if you'll excuse me, I'd better go find our witch before he short-circuits the whole building and causes a black out."

Eight

Chapter Notes

1 John 3:14
He who does not love abides in death

See the end of the chapter for more notes

New Orleans, 18 years ago

Will swept his thumb over the ring hidden in his pocket, a nervous habit he'd developed as of late.

Magdalena was reinforcing the wards around the house, muttering lowly in her native Puerto Rican Spanish. She smudged the goat's blood and burnt Mandrake ashes over the top of all the door frames from the old stone bowl she used for her spells, a relic that had been passed down through all the witches in her family for centuries.

Magdalena came from a long line of witches, all born with powerful healing magic. Every woman in her family, spanning back hundreds of years, had been born a witch. Will envied her, that she had known all her life who she was, what she was. Envied that her magic had been celebrated and encouraged, not hidden for sixteen years like his until the turmoil and trauma of life had finally woken it from its repressed state.

A downside to her incredibly strong magic, however, was her bloodhound-like ability to notice the tiniest of things. The smallest shifts of energy.

Six months ago, Will had torn his room apart, looking for possessions that had belonged to his mother. He had found nothing, other than the battered photograph of her he'd kept folded in his wallet. He had not taken anything of hers with him when he had run away from Beau four years ago. In the last two years, since his secret decision to resurrect Josephine, Will had desperately been searching for any of her belongings he could use for her evocation.

His hidden, private research he had kept from Magdalena over the last two years had taught him that if he had any chance of summoning her, he at least needed something that had belonged to her. He'd slipped from the house in the middle of the night months ago and had driven all the way back to Lafayette, breaking into his old childhood home where Tommy still resided. He had cast a cloaking spell over himself, making his presence undetectable to Tommy's sleeping form, grimacing when he noticed Tommy was not alone in bed. A new girlfriend, no doubt.

He rifled through drawers and cupboards, boxes and shelves, searching for anything of Josephine's.

He found her old wedding ring buried in a box at the back of Tommy's closet. He snatched it without a second thought, and then fled into the night, his heart threatening to break through his chest it pounded against his ribcage so hard.

When he got back to New Orleans, to the safe haven of Magdalena's old plantation that was now also his home, he'd shoved the ring in the back of his dresser and hadn't looked at it again for weeks. Fear had sunk its claws into his bones, rattled him, and made him think twice about what he had been learning and planning in secret all these years. But then one day he'd slipped the ring into his pocket, retrieving it from its hiding place in his dresser, and the aching hole in his chest opened up again with a new rawness that bruised him from the inside out.

His grief swallowed him whole again, and he sank into a depression he thought he'd never see again.

He barely left his room. Barely left his bed. The only thing that kept him grounded was the feel of the smooth metal band rubbed beneath the flesh of his thumb.

It didn't take long for Magdalena to notice. Whilst she and Will were not joined at the hip and she was sometimes gone for days, nights at a time, she picked up on the shift in Will straight away.

At first she thought a demon had possessed him whilst he'd been practising his evocations and seances. She'd launched into a tirade of hissing and spitting exorcism spells, smearing runes on his skin, drawing protective symbols all over the walls and floors of his bedroom. It was only when she dragged him from his bed in the middle of the night and began dunking him a bath of oily water whilst chanting, that he finally fought back, struggled against her and shoved her back against the bathroom tiles with a single blast of power from his outstretched palm.

"For the last time Mags, I'm not *possessed* !" He'd spluttered, wiping the horrid concoction of oil and water from his face and wet curls.

He wrenched himself from the tub, clothes sodden and heavy, dripping water all over the floor. She got to her feet, eyes blazing and jaw clenched.

"Exactly what a demon would say," she accused him.

"You know what? Come with me," Will snapped, grabbing her wrist and pulling her from the bathroom.

He went to her bedroom, flinging the door open and seizing one of the numerous bottles of holy water stored in bottles shaped like the Virgin Mary from her shelves.

He flicked the cap off the bottle and drained the entire thing as she gawped at him.

"There? Would I be able to drink holy water if I was possessed?" he hissed at her, still sodden wet and fuming with anger.

She crossed her arms over her chest and narrowed her eyes at him. “No. I suppose not. I apologise, little moth.”

He had sighed and trudged back to bed, ignored her grumbled reminder to pray the Joyful Mystery of the Rosary when he woke up in the morning with an extra Angelus at noon.

Panic over about demonic possession, she was now convinced a cursed object was buried somewhere in the house. She’d ripped up floorboards, chipped away tiles, wrenched apart the attic, to find nothing. Then, she decided another witch must have hexed them. She’d scoured the house for curse runes, symbols of ill intent, branches and twigs shaped into malevolent structures, even dolls. She’d called upon every witch in New Orleans, either snarling down the line at them through her cell or slipping into argumentative states of meditation in which she communicated telepathically with them.

Will still wasn’t quite sure how she worked *that* particular magic. Will wondered if they really *would* end up cursed after a particularly nasty disagreement with some practitioners of Vodou and Santeria after Magdalena had flung her accusations about - the last thing they needed was someone evoking Papa Legba to come after them.

He watched her do all this, and yet he still did not confess to her the the tip in energy, the strange feeling around the house she’d been getting, was because of the slowly brewing magic festering under his skin as he grew more and more obsessive over the ring and what he was going to do with it.

What he *had* already been doing with it.

He’d gotten halfway to summoning his mother, backing out and ceasing the ritual before he could go much further, playing a proverbial game of chicken with himself and his magic. He’d cast numerous circles, uttered multiple spells and incantations, only to stop part way and shove the ring back inside his pocket, snapping his rapidly growing personal Grimoire shut and blowing out the candles around the evocation circle. All the pent up energy that was summoned through these spells and rituals but never came to fruition was starting to bubble up in the air around the house, and it was driving Magdalena stir crazy.

Hence, the goat’s blood and Mandrake ash that was currently being smeared everywhere.

“All these years I’ve lived here,” she grumbled, mixing the ash and blood together in a fresh batch, “and this has never happened. You feel it too, no?”

Will nodded feebly, too cowardly to confess to her that the house felt *wrong* because of all of his abandoned attempts to summon his mother.

“Will,” she sighed suddenly, beckoning him over.

He went immediately. He always went when she called for him.

“Drink,” she instructed, leaving no room for argument in her stern tone as she held the bowl aloft to him.

He grimaced, choking on the vile taste as he swallowed the blood and ash mixture she'd streaked across the house. She downed the remaining contents of the bowl in one after he was done, not even flinching. Before he could sidle away from her, she was grasping his face in her tiny, thin hands and forcing him to look down at her.

"I see you withering, mi amor," she said softly between them, her wide green eyes pleading with him. "What are you keeping so tightly wrapped up in yourself?"

Will swallowed, closing his eyes. "I don't know. I can't help it."

"Of course you cannot help it," she rebuked him, shaking her head. "How you feel is not *wrong* , or bad. I simply wish to make the hurt go away. To understand what is so clearly eating at you."

"It's all of it," he found himself whispering. "I just feel like the last few years have finally caught up with me."

She nodded slowly. "Your grief is so profound. So heavy. Your shoulders ache under the weight of it."

He twisted away from her, but her hands held his face fast. She always saw too much.

"I know you, mi pequeña polilla," she sighed. "And I know what you do when you slip under the shadow of your pain again. Let me help you out of it."

"What I do? And what exactly is that, Mags?" he muttered, a little bitterly.

She smiled sadly at him. "You self-destruct, mi amor. And sometimes you take others down with you when the pain blinds you so much you don't realise the extent to which it has grown. Your magic and your pain are so intertwined - I've felt your magic writhing around for months now."

"It's nothing," he lied, looking away.

"Don't give in to it," she urged him, gripping his face a little tighter, eyes wide and pleading. "Remember everything I've taught you, everything I have shared with you. There is nothing, *nothing* , I would not do for you, Will. You are my greatest love, but you must fight for yourself too."

Her words brought stinging tears to his eyes immediately, a thick knot forming in his throat. "Magdalena."

"You think I lie?" she laughed softly, finally letting him go. "Our Lady has whispered to me from the day I was born of how important I would be one day. I never knew what she truly meant until she finally breathed your name to life whilst I prayed to her. All those years ago, when she finally showed you to me in my dreams. I saw you before I met you, little moth, and I have loved you ever since. It is important to me that you know you are loved. That you know I am so happy that my purpose to guide you and protect you is finally being fulfilled after all these years of wondering what our beloved Mother had planned for me."

“Your life is worth more than that,” Will disagreed, blinking back his tears. “You have so much more purpose than being shackled to my side whilst I butcher the craft you’ve tried so hard to teach me.”

She tipped her head back and laughed in that manic way she often did. “I didn’t have to find you that night, Will. I didn’t have to take you in and build this life with you. But I did, because the minute I saw your face in my dreams, I knew you were special. That you were meant to be my companion, my Ward. Mi pequeña polilla.”

Will couldn’t help but smile at the old nickname. He crushed her tiny body to him in a tight hug, inhaling the scent of roses and incense that clung to her hair and thanking God that she existed.

The circle was drawn, the white chalk stark against the floorboards. The curtains were shut, the candles lit, his blood already spilt and smeared into the shapes of the necessary runes for this ritual along his throat and over his heart. The salt circle was small, tight, and barely left him any room to move within it.

At the centre of the circle, his mother’s old wedding ring sat in a small bowl of his blood, crushed yarrow petals drowning in the crimson alongside the ring.

Tonight, he was ready to finally find his mother.

Magdalena was gone, summoned to the New Orleans headquarters by the coven to help with an outbreak of strange illnesses that were sweeping through numerous neighbourhoods, her healing magic badly needed. She’d be gone for at least a day.

Eesha slithered across the floorboards in front of him, edging the salt circle as her tongue flickered into the air rhythmically. The sight of her shining scales grounded him as he opened his Grimoire and took a deep breath. He felt the burst of energy break through the room as he finished his first set of incantations, humming them low and soft. The magic that seemed to live in a pit in his stomach stirred, rising within him like vines stretching for the sun.

He pushed past the fear that crept along his spine, going further than he ever had before.

He kept his eyes on the ring, speeding up his chants as he came closer and closer to finishing the spell. He let his magic claw forth from within him, felt it seep from his skin into the air, watched the flames of the candles flicker in his peripheral vision as Eesha kept her studious perimeter around the salt circle.

It bubbled within him, his magic, his power, and he finally spat forth the final incantation, breathing raggedly.

Nothing.

The air went still, flat, and the flames dimmed. Eesha’s body slowed to a sluggish crawl around him. His magic simmered down to its usual quiet hum, and he realised with biting disappointment that the ritual *hadn’t worked* .

Not lingering a moment longer, Will rose to feet, angrily dashing more of his blood from fresh cuts on his palms as he spilt it over the salt and hissed in the Old Tongue the words that would close the circle.

Close the circle. Close the fucking circle.

Will wasn't sure if he'd lost his mind - did one truly lose their minds if they knew that what they were doing was wrong?

And yet, there was no other explanation for what he was doing, because no sane person would do what he was about to do tonight. But perhaps insane wasn't the right term for it - more like desperate beyond belief.

He'd driven to Lafayette again in the middle of the night, slipping out the house whilst Magdalena was asleep. He'd arrived at the graveyard a little after two in the morning, armed with a bag of magic supplies, a torch, and a heavy shovel.

He'd attempted the spell numerous times since that night it had failed. And the result was the same every time; his magic swelled, he felt himself on the precipice of something *huge* , and then it vanished as if it had never existed in the first place. It was infuriating, maddening and had only served to push him further to the brink of *this* - of what he was going to do tonight.

Will's breath seemed to get stuck in his throat with each step he took through the graveyard of Saint Genevieve, the night dark and quiet around him as he made his way down the rows of headstones. He hadn't been to visit Josephine's grave since he'd run away from Lafayette and fled to New Orleans, but he knew the exact spot in which to find her resting place. Her headstone was simple, plain and unassuming. The marble structure welcomed him, bearing nothing but her name, her date of birth and her date of death, and then underneath:

Beloved wife of Tommy

Mother to Will

Will's lips twitched into a grimace at the inscription.

Setting the torch down, Will didn't let himself think or consider what he was doing for a single moment. He simply took a deep breath, tilted his head to the sky, and then curled his hands around the shovel as he forced it into the earth. If he stopped, paused, he would falter. And he'd tried for too long, searched for too many years, to abandon his plan now. It was just like the night of his overdose when he had been a teenager, stricken through with grief and pain so agonising he'd forced handful after handful of pills down his throat. He hadn't let himself stop that night either, knowing that if he did, he'd failed.

No going back now.

By the time the shovel hit Josephine's coffin with a dull *thunk* , Will was sweating, covered in soil and dirt, his shirt clinging to his damp back and chest. He wiped his arm across his forehead, smearing the dirt away from his eyes as he chucked the shovel back up to the

surface. Adrenaline made him shake, his legs and hands quivering and his stomach churning as he placed his palm flat over the coffin. Will clambered back to the surface, grabbing the crowbar and then sliding back down into the grave.

The whispers and groans plaguing the back of his head, buzzing in his ears like the drone of a thousand flies, seemed to reach a crescendo as he pried the crowbar along the seal of Josephine's coffin. Graveyards were not exactly Will's favourite place to be, seeing as the Dead lurched into a frenzy upon sensing his presence. They called to him, pleading, sobbing, screeching sometimes, some of them like sirens as they sang and murmured into the air for only him to hear.

He blocked it out the best he could as he wrenched with all his might on the crowbar, breaking the seal of the coffin open and trying to keep the contents of his stomach inside of himself. He tossed the crowbar aside and then gingerly began to lift the lid, closing his eyes as the scent of decay hit him. When he opened his watering eyes, he nearly baulked at the sight of Josephine's body, turning away abruptly and clamping his hand over his mouth. A few deep breaths later, he forced himself to look back at her.

He knew she would be decomposed. He just hadn't expected her to still look like his mother.

But there she was, laid in the velvet and silk interior of the coffin, like a rotting wax figure. Will couldn't help it; he squeezed his fist around his rosary beads that he'd slung around his neck and uttered a brief, quick prayer, the words tumbling from his trembling lips.

There was mould growing on her clothes, her hair nothing but a few wisps, and what was left of her skin strained like saran wrap over her bones. He knelt down next to the coffin, bile rising in his throat.

"I'm sorry," he whispered to her decayed face, tears pricking his eyes. "I'm so sorry."

Everything was ready. The ritual was well-rehearsed by now, the placement of the candles and the salt and the particular, carefully drawn magic circle like second nature now to Will. He could conduct this spell with his eyes closed by now, the amount of times he had performed it with his mother's old wedding ring in numerous failed attempts.

Josephine's body was tenderly laid in the magic circle that Will had dug into the grass by her grave, wrapped in the white shroud he'd had brought. His blood was already spilt, smeared across what was left of her lips and over her heart where ribs were starting to protrude through the skin. His Grimoire laid open on the earth next to his bare feet, toes curling into the churned up soil to ground himself. The air in the graveyard felt thick, gelatinous. Breathing was difficult. His eyes felt grainy. His blood felt like sludge in his veins, even as he sliced a new wound along his wrist and let it dribble over Josephine's corpse as he began to chant.

A choked cry behind him had him stiffening, whirling around in fear and his mouth falling open in horror.

Behind him, a few headstones down, Magdalena stood watching him, her face warped in terror.

“Will,” she started, taking one trembling step towards him. “Will, please.”

“What are you doing here?” he gritted out, beginning to feel dizzy as his blood continued to drip onto the white shroud covering Josephine’s corpse.

“I was hoping I was wrong,” she whispered, barely audible, drawing closer. “That you weren’t really here, that you weren’t going to attempt this.”

“You shouldn’t be here,” he muttered, his entire body rigid. “You need to go home. Go back to New Orleans.”

She shook her head, only a few feet away from him now. “Little moth, please. Please don’t do this.”

“I have to,” he answered simply, looking back at the crimson staining the white shroud in the candlelight of the magic circle, the grains of salt glimmering around him on the earth like tiny crystals.

“You don’t,” she insisted. “It’s not too late to stop.”

“Why should I?” he snapped suddenly, rage bubbling beneath his skin as his magic peaked a little.

“This is forbidden, Will. I don’t have to tell you that. You know already from everything you have read, everything you’ve learned.”

“Says who?” he asked, lip curling. “No one is going to stop me.”

“This is forbidden for a reason!” Magdalena hissed abruptly. “You have no idea what you are tampering with here! This magic is prohibited, even amongst your kind, even to a Necromancer!”

Will’s smile was twisted. “Then why does this ritual exist? Why am I able to perform it?”

“Because the Law does not care who dies! The Law does not discern what will be lost by this, it will simply take and correct the imbalance!” she bit out at him. “The first Necromancers who did this learned the hard way, you foolish boy! It took utter devastation for witches to realise this must never be done!”

“Bullshit,” Will scoffed. “If it was so wrong, I wouldn’t be able to resurrect her in the first place, and I *know* it’s possible. Necromancers have the power to resurrect anyone - if I can resurrect a stranger, I can resurrect my mom.”

“It’s forbidden *because* it is your mother!” Magdalena cried, eyes wide and frantic. “This is no stranger, Will! Your proximity to her puts you in immediate danger, because you are of her, because your energies are too similar! The Law knows blood, knows kin - it will demand

you take her place if this works. *You* will die, just so she can be brought back to a world where her only child is dead!"

"I'll make it work," he insisted. "Death is my magic; it bends to me, to my will."

She shook her head viciously, stalking the salt circle. "Your soul will be taken in exchange for your mother's - do you think she will thank you for this? You mustn't do this, Will, please - I'm begging you, little moth."

"Fuck the Law," he sneered. "Fuck the balance. Death won't take me, won't take my soul. I *can* do this, Magdalena, I know I can."

"You know nothing!" she shrieked, a murder of crows squawking and fleeing from their perch in a nearby tree at the sound. "You insolent *child* ! You think yourself above the very things that could rip your existence into oblivion!"

"Why should I cower to rules that were written so long ago, by people that were too scared to embrace Death magic in its entirety?" Will retorted, stepping to the edge of the salt circle. "I *refuse* , Magdalena. I refuse to let the very magic that runs through my blood be suppressed. I can tip the scales, keep myself *and* her here!"

"I forbid you," she spat, clenched hands shaking at her sides. "You will kill yourself, Will, for good this time. There is no coming back from this."

"No," he murmured, the darkness in his eyes beginning to seep in at the corners already.

Magdalena's stomach dropped at the sight.

The darkness spread like ink dropped into water across Will's eyes, consuming his iris and engulfing his sclera, his magic pulling him under. Around them, wind began to stir, whipping through the gravestones.

"Mi amor," she pleaded, dropping to her knees. "I am *begging* you not to do this. I know you are hurting, know that you are lonely, but this is not the answer. I promise you this is not the right thing to do!"

"Get up," he scoffed, turning away from her. "You're better than that, Magdalena."

"I am not," she begged, her voice cracking. "I am not above pleading on my knees with you, if it's what will make you stop."

"Nothing will make me stop," he rasped gently, bending to pick up his Grimoire, looking back at her one last time over his shoulder. "Go home, Magdalena."

He ignored her pleas, her sobs as he began to chant, began to hiss and growl the Old Tongue and its chorus of twisting syntax. Magdalena yelped and jerked backwards as the magic circle Will had dug into the ground erupted into flames, fire licking along each line and curve of the shapes and symbols he had created. The wind around them picked up, lashing through the graveyard at a terrifying speed and whipping Will's hair about his face, Magdalena's tumbling dark curls ripped about in the air.

“Will! Please!” she yelled over the screeching gale, crawling closer to him.

He turned to face her, her heart sinking as she saw his magic had overridden him, no glint of conscious thought in the darkness of his eyes as he continued to utter the spell. His left hand gripped open his Grimoire as she drew closer, tears rolling down her face.

“Stop,” she croaked, sick to her stomach at the emptiness in his eyes. “Mi amor, please stop this!”

Will’s face remained blank as he raised his right hand, blood still seeping from his wrist, and sent Magdalena flying backwards through the air with a burst of power so sharp she careened through the air, her body splitting against a headstone behind her. It knocked the breath from her lungs, made her head throb and pain sear through her back. Will turned away again, empty black eyes fixed on Josephine’s body.

Magdalena watched in horror as the blood soaked shroud over Josephine’s body began to twitch. Will’s chorus of spells in the Old Tongue became louder, more rapid, rising in volume as the magic took hold.

She pushed herself to her feet, grabbing the headstone for support, and staggered towards him. The wind nearly knocked her from her feet it was so strong, blinding her. The fire pitched higher around Will and his mother’s body as the ritual began to peak.

Will slashed the dagger across his wrist again, pouring forth more blood he couldn’t afford to give, screaming now as he pushed through the seal he felt vibrating around Josephine’s body, willing his magic to spill forth, the feed into Josephine’s body.

“No!” Magdalena cried, diving forwards as the wind whipped the shroud away and suddenly -

Josephine’s sewn shut eyelids ripped open as she bolted upright, the moment Will collapsed to the ground.

Will felt himself fading almost immediately as Josephine’s chest rose for the first time.

Her eyes were milky white, rotten, and her mouth that had been wired shut when she had been embalmed jerked and rippled as her jaws fought to open. The flesh tore and crumbled, decayed teeth bared in her mouth as she lifted a festering arm towards him. When she spoke, it made Will’s skin crawl, despite how quickly he felt himself slipping into the all consuming darkness that was wrapping around him.

“ *Will* ,” she ground out, her voice like stones dragged over each other in an avalanche.

“Mom,” he wheezed weakly, reaching for her through the flames.

Her dead eyes stared right through him. He managed to inch himself the tiniest bit closer, just enough to be by her side. To touch her.

“Please,” he cried quietly, his life slipping through his fingers like grains of sand, his heart beginning to slow. “I just wanted… please just hold me, one last time. *Please* .”

Her decayed head titled, nearly snapping at the neck as her half-decomposed eyes remained unmoving. “ *Even in death you disappoint. You should have left me in the ground.* ”

“Mom,” he whispered.

It was the last word he managed to utter before his magic failed him, and he felt the tendrils of Death work their way into his veins, wrapping around his heart. His head lolled to the side, and the last thing he saw was Magdalena’s bruised face through the flames of the magic circle, a vicious gleam of determination in her eyes as she stepped into the circle and reached for Will.

There is nothing, nothing *, I would not do for you, Will. You are my greatest love, but you must fight for yourself too.*

Pain was not unfamiliar to Will. It was a constant companion - emotional, mental and physical.

The pain that radiated through every fibre of his being now, however, was unlike anything he’d ever felt before.

He recognised the ceiling of his bedroom. He recognised the smell of his bed sheets draped over his body. His body, which felt like it had been burned to cinders.

“Don’t move.”

The voice was soft, gentle. Unfamiliar, but not entirely.

Her face went in and out of focus as she peered over him. Soft, rosy skin. Glossy brown hair. Glowing blue eyes. She was stunning.

“Who… ‘lana?” he rasped, his throat searing in agony as he spoke.

His eyes finally managed to focus on her. Alana Bloom. A witch from the New Orleans coven he had only ever met once before, during his initiation ceremony into coven four years ago. Magdalena had dragged him to the coven headquarters against his reluctance, insisting he must be initiated.

“I know, pequeña polilla,” she sighed. “I dislike integrating myself into that group of bitches just as much as you do, but you must be accepted, must join. All witches must be a part of a coven.”

Alana had been the one face he hadn’t reeled back from, the one set of eyes that hadn’t burnt through him when it was announced his magic was Necromancy. When the destructive nature of his power didn’t send her scuttling back like it did the others, Will had decided she must not be all bad.

“Hush,” she soothed him, her fingers gently stroking his hair back from his feverish skin. “Don’t strain yourself, Will.”

“What… what’re you doing here?” he gritted out, squeezing his eyes shut as the pounding in his mind threatened to split his head apart.

“I volunteered to watch over you until you’re well again,” she explained, her voice like a balm over the ache that crawled within him. “Death is no small thing to recover from.”

He stared at her dumbfounded.

She sighed, tucking a strand of dark hair behind her ear. “I used my Sight to scry when Magdalena came to me and said your future had become blurry to her, that her prayers were met with silence when she knew something was wrong.”

Soft fingers combed his hair again. Will vaguely remembered something about Alana’s magic being her Sight, her ability to scry to see into the future and enter states of altered consciousness to decipher things that had yet come to pass.

“It took me a while to see what would happen. It was too late, by then.”

“What are you talking about?” Will breathed out roughly, swallowing with a wince.

“The night you went to resurrect your mother, I saw what you would do. I told Magdalena straight away, but you were already gone by the time I contacted her. I warned Magdalena that I saw you would be successful, told her not to go, but she went anyway, knowing what she would have to do.”

“Magdalena - where is she?”

Alana’s silence was crushing, deafening.

“Will… the Law, you know what it is. The spell you performed worked, but took your life in exchange for your mother’s resurrection. Magdalena saved you mere minutes before you died, but it depleted every ounce of healing magic that she had, you were so far gone.”

“ *Where* is she?” Will demanded, panic rising in his chest, hissing in pain as he struggled to sit up.

A gentle palm pressed him back down into the bed.

“It took everything she had to save you. You were on the brink of death, and as strong as her magic was, the Law still demands balance. It took her life in exchange for yours.”

Will felt like he had died all over again.

“She’s gone, Will. She died to save you, and she knew she’d die that night if she went after you. She did it anyway.”

Will let the darkness take him again, crippled and crumbling under the weight of Alana’s words.

Chapter End Notes

Angelus: a Catholic prayer and devotion that is recited three times a day to commemorate the Incarnation of Christ.

Scrying: a practice rooted in divination and fortune-telling. It involves gazing into a medium, hoping to receive significant messages or visions that could offer personal guidance, prophecy, revelation, or inspiration.

Vodou: an African diasporic religion that developed in Haiti between the 16th and 19th centuries. It arose through a process of syncretism between several traditional religions of West and Central Africa and Roman Catholicism.

Santeria: an Afro-Caribbean religion that developed in Cuba during the late 19th century. It arose amid a process of syncretism between the traditional Yoruba religion of West Africa, the Roman Catholic form of Christianity, and Spiritism.

Papa Legba: a spirit in Haitian Vodou who serves as the intermediary between God and humanity.

Thank you so much once again for all the love everyone, it makes me all melty inside <3

Nine

Chapter Notes

Psalm 91:5-6
You will not fear the terror of the night,
nor the arrow that flies by day,
nor the pestilence that stalks in darkness,
nor the destruction that wastes at noonday.

Jimmy eyed the alligator skull Will held in his lap with something akin to morbid curiosity. Jack was firmly, adamantly, *not* speaking to Will, still furious after the witch had gasped loudly upon spotting the gator skull on the side of the road and insisting Jack pull over so he could collect it. Jack refused. Will had simply unbuckled his seat belt, used his magic to tamper with the locks on the car, and flung the door open as they whizzed down the road.

Zeller had made a sound like a dying cat as Will had tumbled from the car.

Jack had screeched the car to a halt, wide eyes staring into the rear-view mirror to see the witch stagger to his feet behind them and stumble over to the skull to collect it.

“You know, I reckon if you put the car in reverse and put your foot down, you’d have a pretty good chance of hitting him,” Zeller suggested nonchalantly.

He’d earned warning looks from *everyone* in the car after that comment.

Will had clambered back into the car, covered in road rash, his hair sticking up wildly, and a tear in his jeans along his left thigh that revealed a raw looking strip of flesh. Jimmy and Beverly had looked at him, *appalled* , mouths hanging open as they were lost for words.

“Will,” Hannibal said, finally breaking the silence in the car. “Are you alright?”

Will cricked his neck, flinching. “Well, I would have been better if Jack would have just stopped the car like I asked him too.”

“You just threw yourself out of a moving vehicle for a *gator skull* ,” Jimmy deadpanned, shaking his head. “I’d say you’ve lost your mind but…”

Will sniffed haughtily. “I’ve been after one of these for a while. You would have thought that one would have washed up in the river at the bottom of my garden by now, but no such luck.”

“You’re insane,” Zeller muttered, hiding his face in his hands. “You’re literally batshit crazy.”

Will ignored him, hissing in pain when Hannibal's fingers gently touched the bump forming on his head. Beverly was sat up front with Jack, leaving Hannibal, Zeller, Jimmy and Will to squabble in the back seats. Will's bad luck of course meant he'd been left with the seat next to the professor.

"Don't touch me," he grumbled, swatting Hannibal's hand away as if it were a fly.

"Jack, I think he may need- "

"He can get medical attention *after* we've been to see the coven," Jack replied curtly. "If he wants to injure himself by throwing himself out of a moving car, that's on him. Concussions can wait for all I care - we've got a job to do."

Beverly turned around and looked at Will with narrowed eyes, suspicious. "Please tell me you didn't throw yourself out of the car hoping it would mean you get out of this meeting with the coven."

Will winced, and not from his bumps and scrapes. "Well, no… I *did* want to grab this skull. But if it gets me out of - "

"It does not," Jack cut in.

Will snapped his mouth shut, scowling down at the gator skull in his lap.

"What do you even need an alligator skull for anyway?" Beverly asked warily.

"A cool decoration for my porch," Will replied dryly, rolling his eyes. "Magic, obviously."

"Well, yes, but… what kind of magic? What kind of spell?"

Will dusted a bit of what looked suspiciously like gator brain off the skull onto the floor of Jack's SUV. Zeller recoiled.

"You wouldn't understand and I quite frankly don't have the energy to explain it to you, Bev," came the answer from the witch.

The car fell into silence as they continued their drive, Jack merely grateful that the road had been empty when Will had flung himself from the car. Hannibal kept staring at Will, taking in every cut and scrape on his skin, until Will turned and glared daggers at the older man.

"What?" he half hissed, half whispered, not wanting the whole car to hear their conversation. "Stop staring at me, Lecter."

Hannibal raised an eyebrow. "Oh? Lecter now, is it?"

"Yes," Will grumbled. "You're getting far too comfortable around here."

"How so?"

“Well, considering I caught you attempting to go sneaking around the upstairs of my house, you used my fucking kitchen to bake bread and make soup, you helped yourself to one of my manuscripts in a collection you *never* should have touched whilst I was passed out, and you’re now apparently *best friends* with the New Orleans coven - I’d say you’re pretty fucking comfortable, Professor Lecter.”

Hannibal blinked, his face devoid of all emotion in that way that unsettled Will, made him squirm in his seat. “I apologised already for overstepping the mark concerning the out of bounds areas of your home. As for the meal I prepared for you after you suffered a traumatic physical and spiritual experience, I won’t apologise for trying to look after you. And you were asleep for quite a while - I’m sorry if reading a book to pass the time was so wrong of me.”

Will swallowed. “Sure, go ahead and make yourself the good guy in all this.”

“I’m unsure of how I’ve wronged you exactly, Will, but I’m merely trying to help this investigation and ultimately help *you* .”

Will leaned forwards in the already limited space between them in the car, right next to Hannibal’s ear. “I don't need anyone's help. I certainly do not need *your* help.”

The proximity of the witch next to him sent shivers down Hannibal’s spine, the hairs standing up on the back of his neck. He felt as though he’d practically drown in the intense magic that seemed to swell and crest around Will in an invisible aura, stroking and caressing over Hannibal’s senses. It was intoxicating, despite the ire from the witch that accompanied it. It was part of what made it so hard not to glaze over Will’s bitterness. That, and the fact Hannibal had no qualms in admitting to himself he found the witch devastatingly beautiful. Hannibal could overlook Will’s contempt when he was so utterly captivated with the younger man’s beauty.

“So,” Jimmy announced suddenly, interrupting Hannibal before he could whisper anything back to Will. “Has anyone else been having crazy nightmares the last few nights?”

“No,” Zeller snorted. “Why would we?”

Jimmy shrugged. “Just wondered. I keep dreaming I’m beheading my parents.”

Zeller made a spluttering, choked noise in shock. “ *Excuse me* ?”

“It’s really quite alarming,” Jimmy sighed in agreement.

“Whilst I haven’t been dreaming about executing my mom and dad, I have had some… strange things happen over the last few days,” Beverly commented carefully. “Just small stuff.”

“Like?” Jimmy pushed.

“It sounds kind of gross, but I keep smelling something weird around the apartment I’m staying in whilst we’re down here for work,” Bev admitted. “I asked a handyman to come

round and check the drains and gutters, but it's all clear."

Will sat up bolt right. "What does it smell like?"

Hannibal studied him curiously, fascinated by his sudden change, despite the way he still cradled the gator skull.

"Kind of like… I don't know, I guess it's kind of like sulphur?" Bev answered, scratching her wrist.

Will went pale. "Shit."

Bev rolled her eyes. "Well yeah, if you want to be crude about it Will, sulphur does pretty often smell like an eggy fart."

"No, not like *that* ," Will muttered. "I mean… Jack, have you noticed anything strange?"

A grunt came from the driver's seat. "Nope."

"You sure?"

"Positive."

"Wait, didn't you mention you keep hearing some kind of bird right outside your bedroom window?" Zeller butted in, leaning forwards in his seat next to Jimmy.

"Oh yeah," Jack acknowledged, flicking the indicator on as he turned the car down the road Will slowly started to recognise. "Not great for my sleep, let me tell you."

Will shot forwards, grasping the headrest of the driver's seat. "What kind of bird?"

It was barely a question. His voice came out flat, grave and unnerving.

"Uh, let me think," Jack hummed, driving the car further, the hulking mass of the compound growing nearer in the distance.

Will felt his stomach twist at the sight of it, but the direction of the conversation in the car was making him feel like there was an iron band around his lungs. "What kind of fucking bird, Jack?"

"I'm trying to remember," Jack snapped in annoyance, squinting at the compound as they approached. "Jeez, look at this place."

"Jack!" Will yelled suddenly, slamming his hands on the back of the headrest. "What was it?!"

Jack's eyes widened at the outburst. "Jesus, Will, calm down. I think they were owls."

Will felt his heart nearly skip a beat. "You think, or you know?"

“Why’s it important?” Jack asked, slowing the car a little as the long driveway up to the compound came into view. “They’re just birds.”

“If what you are hearing is owls,” Will hissed, “then it’s not a case of *just birds* .”

“Please don’t tell me this is some kind of witchy superstitious bullshit,” Zeller groaned, crossing his arms over his chest. “Give it a rest, Will.”

Will could have bounced his head off the damn window. “Fuck off, Zeller.”

The other man visibly bristled at that, and Will sneered in response, ready to retaliate again, but a warm, broad hand clutched at his non-injured shoulder gently. It forced Will to look back at Hannibal, to see the calming reassurance in those amber eyes to ignore Zeller’s pettiness. Will shrugged out of his grip, jaw clenching. It felt like his skin burned where Hannibal had touched him, warmth seeping under his flesh and licking along his bones.

“I don’t want to frighten you all, but you *should* be scared,” Will began.

“Oh, well that’s reassuring,” Jimmy quipped.

“The nightmares, the smell of sulphur, the *owls* … I’m sorry to tell you this, but these are all signs of demonic activity.”

“Hang on - why is this only coming up now?!” Zeller demanded. “How long have you been sat on this information for?”

“Well, between making myself *die* and then getting a spirit to transfer her fucking memories to me whilst I was in the Netherworld, on top of recovering from all of that, I’ve not had much time,” Will snapped at him.

“What if they’re just coincidences?” Beverly insisted. “Nightmares and strange smells could be anything.”

Will shook his head grimly. “There are no such things as coincidences when it comes to magic. These are just the beginning symptoms. This thing - it’s like a disease, an infection that spreads before you even realise there’s something happening. The nightmares turn into compulsions until you find yourself stood over a bloody corpse with no idea how you got there. The smells are followed by things moving in the corner of your eye, calling your name, disrupting your home relentlessly. The owls… they’re a symbol of death amongst witches.”

“Great. Fucking great. Just what I want to hear before we step inside a house full of witches that can poison us, or make us forget who we are, or - ” Jimmy began, but Jack cut him off.

“We always knew it was a risk with being around Necromancy,” Jack interrupted. “We don’t have time to stress about this now. We’ll deal with it later. First, we need to interview these damned witches, then we can deal with any potential demons.”

And with that, Jack’s word was final.

Will's leg jittered up and down, his knee bouncing sporadically. Hannibal surveyed the nervous action with that cool, calculated gaze of his and Will glared at him in response, clenching his jaw and crossing his slightly shaking arms over his chest, inhaling deeply through his nose.

Hannibal thought the tendons on the side of Will's jaw and neck looked ready to burst through his skin he looked so uncomfortable, teeth gritted so tightly. The nervous, apprehensive energy pouring from the witch seemed to be affecting the others too, whether they knew it or not; Zeller was fidgeting, Jimmy looked a little clammy and Beverly was chewing her lip as she twisted and untwisted her fingers atop the sleek ash table they sat waiting around.

Jack, of course, seemed unfazed. He simply looked around the room with that scrutinous gaze, drumming his fingers on the round table. Hannibal watched the door, waiting for the witches to enter and sit at the empty seats placed around the large, circular table.

They were sat in the decadent, shady meeting room used in the coven's compound for instances like this. They sat in wait for the leading members of the coven to arrive, their position most comparable to that of a council. They made decisions regarding the coven's financial and political issues, oversaw ceremonies, and dealt with public relations.

They were also the ones who had initiated the vote to exile Will from the coven.

Hannibal knew they were approaching even before the door opened, because Will suddenly sat upright, eyes wide and fixed on the door. A low, hissing wind swept under the table, darting around their legs, and Hannibal wasn't sure if Will was even conscious he'd caused the stir in the air.

Finally, they arrived, the grand double doors framed by elegant velvet drapes and lush potted plants opening wide to reveal the council. Only three of them were granting Jack and the team an audience today, but all coven councils were made up of thirteen members. It was a tradition that dated far back, as old as the concept of a coven itself; there could be no coven without the thirteen leaders, no matter the size of the coven as a whole.

Alana Bloom's eyes found Will's immediately, and Hannibal watched curiously as an unspoken conversation seemed to happen between them. Raphael followed next, a witch known for his healing affinities, and then Agnes. She was the eldest witch amongst them, and had been leading the New Orleans coven for as long as anyone could remember. Whilst her magic encompassed all the typical powers witches possessed, she was known for her abilities to shape and impress upon thoughts, something that had earned her the grumbled nickname of Truth Twister.

"Good afternoon," Agnes greeted them coolly, face devoid of emotion. "Hannibal; a pleasure to see you again."

Hannibal rose, accepting the pale hand she held out to him and pressed his lips to it. "Agnes; I must thank you again for granting us an audience with you."

The very air bristled with power in the presence of three new witches. Will merely scoffed not so subtly at Hannibal's greeting.

"Will," Agnes said, as if she'd swallowed something particularly sour, sneering at him. "How long has it been?"

"Not long enough," the surly witch responded, baring his teeth in fake smile. "But if you're counting, eighteen years."

"And you remain as pleasant as I remember," Agnes commented, taking her seat.

Alana and Raphael sat next to her, flanking her. Alana's eyes had not strayed from Will once. Hannibal flicked his gaze to Raphael and saw the blatant hunger in his eyes as he raked them over the Necromancer; the sight made Hannibal bristle.

"So," Jack began, "thank you for meeting with us. We're here on official FBI business, as Hannibal discussed with you when he reached out. We're hoping you may be able to help us with a rather difficult case we're currently working on."

Raphael cocked his head. "We are not so used to the government gracing us with their presence."

"We're not the government," Jimmy cut in, shaking his head.

"Who do you work for then?" Raphael countered. "Who enabled your existence as a corporation, a unit? You are agents of them whether you admit it or not."

Jimmy fell silent at that, sitting back and blinking, pink flaming his cheeks. Bev shot him a sympathetic look.

"And who do *you* work for, Will?" Raphael continued, leaning forwards to place his elbows on the table.

He was practically undressing Will with his eyes. Will met him head on, icy blue eyes countering the rich hazel smoulder of Raphael - Hannibal began to wonder exactly what the deal was between the two witches.

"I do not work for anyone. I never have."

"And yet you sit opposite us with these *people* -" Raphael nearly hissed the word - "seeking our counsel. Seems as though you are working with them, to me at least. What exactly could you need our help with?"

"Murders," Jack cut in bluntly. "Five murders, one every month for the last five months. Someone, or multiple people, are murdering victims in the process of summoning a demon. We've collated these for you, images of the murder scenes and the individuals used as sacrifice."

Jack tossed the folder with the photographs from the crime scenes across the table to the trio, letting them absorb the sight of gore and blood, ashes and magic circles with corpses splayed

amongst them. Agnes paled at the photos, Alana shutting her eyes whilst Raphael's lips turned down at the corners.

"This is barbaric," Alana breathed. "Will - what have you been able to discern so far?"

"The last murder was successful," Will answered carefully. "They summoned a demon."

Will reached forwards and tapped a single finger against the images of Francesca's body, carved into like a block of butter. Hannibal continued to watch the way Raphael's eyes raked over the corded muscles flexing in Will's forearm, twitching beneath the dark ink on his skin.

Hannibal knew the look of a starved man when he saw one, witch or no.

"You're sure of it?" Alana asked, frowning. "These circles are… they're erratic, nonsensical. I don't understand half of this."

"He was fine-tuning his craft," Hannibal murmured. "We believe he may have been studying for years, trying to understand how to perform these evocations. What you see is a process of elimination; each murder a new set of runes, a new set of combinations of magic until he found the right formula."

Agnes's dark eyes swept to Will. "You are most knowledgeable about this dark magic. Why do you think we can be of assistance?"

"We wondered if there had been any witches that had left your coven recently," Jack answered for Will. "Any strange behaviour, unusual comings and goings. Any new witches that have been initiated into the coven recently."

"The only witch that has ever left our coven sits at this table," Agnes answered, her voice cold and unflinching as she stared Will down. "We have had no new initiations in the last eight years, and members of our coven certainly *do not* attempt to wield this kind of blood magic or try to summon malevolent beings. That I can vouch for with my life."

"Surely you would know if there was supernatural activity like this happening though?" Beverly queried, gesturing to the images. "This must have caused some sort of disturbance, or someone had sensed it?"

Raphael peered closely at the images, zeroing in on a particular rune carved into Francesca's stomach. " Unfortunately we do not detect and sense every ripple in the pond, my dear. How do you know this one was a successful evocation?"

Will nearly flinched, but instead curled his hands into fists. "Because I saw it. Not as it happened, but I found a way to communicate with the woman who was murdered in this image."

"You saw it? Or you spoke with her?" Agnes asked sharply. "Because hearing the account from someone else's mouth and seeing it with your own eyes are two very different things."

Will drew back to lean against the high back of his chair. "Both."

“You used a transcension ritual, didn’t you?” Agnes spat, tone accusatory and enraged. “Another reckless abomination of magic.”

Will whipped his head to Jack, eyes flaming. “This is why I did not want to be a part of this meeting.”

Jack held his hand up, silencing Will, who rolled his eyes in response. “Will’s been vital to our investigation. I quite frankly don’t care what he does or how he does it, as long as he gets us answers.”

“I still think purposely *dying* and then bringing yourself back to life is a little extreme,” Jimmy chimed in, smiling nervously.

Alana stared at Will. “Tell me you didn’t.”

Will didn’t even look at her. Hannibal noted every pulse of Will’s very visible heartbeat in his jugular, drinking in the image of Will’s inner turmoil unfolding before them. A storm was brewing.

“Why should I lie?” Will said softly, gaze glued to the table. “I did what I had to do. I did what was within my capabilities, and I won’t apologise for my magic and what it can do.”

Agnes leant forwards, her chair creaking. “And this is why you will never be welcomed back to the coven. Why you were banished in the first place, and why you will *always* be on the outside looking in. I wish I could say I am surprised that you so shamelessly used such a forbidden spell, but I am not.”

“Hey,” Beverly snapped, frowning at Agnes. “Watch how you speak to him.”

“You have no understanding of how he sullies all that we hold sacred,” Agnes sneered. “You come here to us, expecting us to have answers to your revolting murder cases, and then rub it in our faces that *he* is committing atrocities in the name of magic?”

“My apologies Agnes, not all of us can have sunshine and rainbows beaming out of our asses when we use our powers,” Will grinned broadly, his voice dripping with contempt. “So what if I did something you disapprove of? You have no jurisdiction over me anymore.”

“The only reason you have even set food in this room is by the grace of Professor Lecter!” Agnes yelled suddenly, furious at Will’s remark. “Do you think I wish to involve my coven once more with *you* ? You are an abomination Will Graham, a dark mark against the reputation we fight to keep clean every fucking day! There is a reason why Necromancers were wiped out, and you are stark reminder of that reason. If Hannibal was not here, I would have had you put down the minute you approached our home!”

Will’s responding smile was sickly sweet, antagonising. “Oh Agnes, I’ve missed you too.”

Agnes rose in a flash, nearly knocking her chair backwards, opening her mouth to speak but clamping it firmly closed when Hannibal rose steadily from his chair and stood behind Will. He placed his hand over Will’s shoulder, gaze boring into Agnes.

“Agnes,” Hannibal said softly, “whilst I appreciate there is bad blood between Will and yourself, I must ask that we be civil. We’re here to try and stop more people dying, after all. If you truly do not have any information we may find useful, then we will take our leave. We didn’t come here for a pissing contest.”

The older witch’s mouth opened and closed repeatedly, her expression torn between scorn and shock. “Hannibal - you do not know half of what this miserable creature has done. He is exiled for a reason, for what he did to one of our own all of those years ago. You defend a *murderer* . Mag - ”

Before Hannibal could respond, before Jack could cut in, the table they sat around cracked in two, the splitting noise deafening as the jagged fracture ruptured across its surface. Agnes yelped and jumped back, the others scuttling back in their chairs whilst the lights in the room began to flicker and the clouds rolled over the sun outside.

Will remained still in the darkening room, but his eyes began to fade into that inky blackness Hannibal had only seen once before.

“Don’t say her name,” Will warned, his voice low and menacing. “This isn’t a box you want to open in front of me, Agnes.”

“You see?” Agnes said breathlessly, gesturing to the tattered remains of the split table. “You see how destructive he is? I bet he hasn’t even told you what he did, why he’s exiled.”

Will moved in a flash, rising to his feet as the glass in the tall windows vibrated and trembled, threatening to shatter under Will’s power. “You have *no* idea, but please, be my guest. Try me and I’ll prove you right - it’s what you want after all, isn’t it? Ask for it Agnes, and I’ll show you destruction like you’ve never seen before.”

Agnes turned to Jack as Alana’s pleading eyes bore into Will, who still ignored her. Raphael merely looked like he wanted to peel Will’s clothes from his body when Hannibal checked him again, the olive skinned witch regarding Will with heated desire after his outburst.

“I kindly ask that you make your way home and take that creature with you,” Agnes snarled. “We do not know anything. We have not seen anything. If we do, someone will contact you, and we will be more vigilant from now on. Now please *leave* .”

Jack and the rest of the team shakily got to their feet, no one daring to even look at Will, who was fighting back the blackness threatening to swallow his eyes. Hannibal however, remained by his side, unmoving as Will struggled to clamp down on his rage and his magic, which were so closely intertwined.

“Wait,” Alana interrupted, ignoring Agnes’s incredulous look. “The last murder, the one where the evocation worked - did you find out *which* demon they managed to summon?”

Will went stiff and sucked in a sharp breath besides Hannibal. “Belial. He summoned Belial.”

The room went silent, and the look of horror that spread across the faces of the trio of witches said all Jack and the team needed to know.

Ten

Chapter Notes

Job 30: 26-31
But when I looked for good, evil came;
and when I waited for light, darkness came.
My heart is in turmoil, and is never still;
days of affliction come to meet me.
I go about blackened, but not by the sun;
I stand up in the assembly, and cry for help.
I am a brother of jackals,
and a companion of ostriches.
My skin turns black and falls from me,
and my bones burn with heat.
My lyre is turned to mourning,
and my pipe to the voice of those who weep.

The car ride back to the New Orleans lab was silent. Will sat curled in on himself next to Hannibal in the back of the car, and the professor's hands itched to reach out and smooth the furrow of Will's brow, to cast his hands through those chocolate curls. Jack's team were looking pale and nervous - bodies and murder and guts were a walk in the park, but they, like so many others, feared the prospect of the unknown. Magic, demons, and the entire supernatural world that they coexisted alongside in blissful ignorance was starting to seep into the cracks in the barrier they had constructed their whole lives, and the worry was clear as day across their faces.

"What do we do?" Beverly broke the silence, twisting in her seat, staring straight at Will.

Will didn't look back - he'd retreated within himself upon leaving the compound of the coven, despite the fierce display of power he had performed in front of Agnes.

The crack from the table was still ringing in Hannibal's ears.

"Will?"

"What?"

"I said, what do we *do* ?" Beverly repeated, her usual calm demeanour fraying at the edges. "We're still no closer to figuring out who our murderer is, the coven had nothing to share with us, and now there's a demon on the loose?"

Will closed his eyes, swallowing. "I don't know, Bev. I'm sorry."

“Well at least tell us what to do on the demon front!” she exclaimed. “This is your area, right? Help us out!”

Will rubbed at his temples, clearly drained. “I can give you protective talismans and cast wards on the apartments you’re staying in for now, but until this escalates, I don’t know how bad the infestation is.”

“Well assume the worst,” Bev said flatly. “Assume the infestation is as bad as it possibly could be. What would you do?”

Will pulled a grim face. “It depends. Records of Belial successfully being summoned are few and far in-between. This isn’t just a regular demon we’re dealing with - this is bigger than anything I’ve ever…”

Will trailed off, his eyes misting over, lips parting slightly.

“Than anything you’ve ever what? *What* , Will? You’re not exactly helping here,” Bev pressed, frowning at him.

“I don’t know how much help I’ll be,” Will confessed, looking ashamed of himself. “I’ve had experiences with demons before, but nothing like this. I don’t know if I have the abilities or the magic to deal with this.”

“You’re already helping,” Hannibal reassured him softly. “You’ve already given so much to this investigation, Will. You nearly didn’t make it earlier this week after the transcension ritual you performed. But you pushed through, and you found us crucial information. We can work with this.”

Will shook his head, rubbing at his jaw nervously. “It’s not enough. Just because we know now which demon our killer summoned, doesn’t mean much in the grand scheme of things.”

“It does,” Hannibal insisted. “That’s where you and I come in, yes? If we both put our heads together, we can find a way of reversing this and undoing the work our killer has done.”

Will glanced at him, a strange mix of worry and curiosity swirling in his vivid blue gaze. “I think until we find our killer, we don’t have much to go on.”

Hannibal tilted his head. “True - but I have a suggestion, and it may not be one that is very popular, but I think it may work.”

Jack’s eyes met Hannibal’s in the rear-view mirror. “Professor?”

Hannibal drew in a deep breath. “A trap, so to speak.”

“I’m listening,” Jack said slowly.

“We know our killer is most likely acting alone, from what Will has been able to garner when he has communicated with the spirits of his victims,” Hannibal began. “Summoning such a dangerous, high ranking demon is no small thing. Our killer is desperate, crazed, driven to extremes.”

“So he's, what, lonely? Wants a partner in crime?”

“Will said when he found Francesca in the Netherworld he was able to access her final moments. Our killer told Francesca he’d been trying to summon the Morning Star with no success, until he apparently felt a calling from Belial.”

“You’ll have to forgive my ignorance - the Morning what?” Zeller interrupted, chewing a thumbnail anxiously.

“The Morning Star,” Will murmured, head tilted back against the headrest with his eyes closed. “The Devil. Lucifer. Satan. The first Fallen Angel. The Serpent. Evil personified. The - ”

“I get it,” Zeller cut him off tersely. “Please continue, Hannibal.”

Hannibal could tell even with Will’s eyes closed that he was rolling them at Zeller.

“Lucifer is a far greater conquest than Belial,” Hannibal carried on. “What if we gave our killer the chance to summon him?”

Jack nearly swerved the car into oncoming traffic, gritting his teeth and blinking rapidly in disbelief. “You want to make our killer think he’s got the chance to summon the *Devil* ?”

Hannibal shrugged nonchalantly. “He won’t, of course, but essentially that is the idea. He is drawn to power. What greater power is there to someone like him than Satan himself?”

“And how are we meant to do all that?” Bev asked sceptically, shaking her head. “Sure, I can see why our killer would be drawn to it, but I have no idea how you want to go about setting this up, Professor.”

Hannibal smiled somewhat sheepishly at Will. “This is where Will comes in.”

Will groaned immediately, scrunching his eyes shut and letting his head fall back against the headrest again with a thump. The ache in his already pounding head from his fall from the car earlier doubled. “Why is it always me?”

“Well, you do have supernatural abilities. The rest of us are just plain old normal,” Jimmy chirped, sending Will a wide smile.

“And how do I come into this?” Will muttered, glaring at Hannibal through the narrowed slits of his eyes.

Hannibal’s lips twitched in the corners. “With your magic, of course.”

“Remind me why the fuck I let you back into my home again?” Will grumbled as he stomped inside through the creaking door of the old plantation.

Hannibal was no more than two steps behind him, those irritatingly smouldering amber eyes sweeping appreciatively over the interior of Will’s hall as he followed the witch inside. He

ducked underneath a low hanging hexafoil made of blackthorn that was hung from the high ceiling, glancing up to see old, faded runes painted in white above them on the ceiling.

“I believe it had something to do with Jack’s instruction that we work together on my plan whilst the others go through CCTV footage they’ve yet to watch.”

Will rounded on him suddenly, his eyes glimmering with annoyance. “Back at the coven’s compound. You didn’t have to say anything or stick up for me in front of Agnes like that. Why did you? You probably ruined any chance you have of being on good terms with the New Orleans coven by doing what you did today.”

“Was I supposed to let you be berated and degraded?”

“Stop doing that,” Will hissed.

“Doing what?”

“Answering questions with questions. You didn’t have to do what you did, to defend me. I want to know *why* .”

Hannibal tilted his head slightly, gaze roaming over the clench of Will’s jaw, the stiff set to his shoulders. “Because she has no right to speak to you the way she did, coven leader or not. I do not care for your past trespasses Will, no matter how awful Agnes thinks you are. It bothered me that she made you out to be something you are not.”

Confusion swept over Will’s face, and Hannibal could see his mind searching for the right words to say in response.

“Something I’m not?” he repeated slowly. “She wasn’t wrong, Hannibal. I deserved it, to be honest, what she said. There’s a reason why I’m exiled after all.”

Will turned and headed further into the house. Hannibal followed him through to the kitchen, admiring the way the setting sun cast crimson-orange waves of light over Will’s face as he turned to look at Hannibal.

“You want to talk about it, don’t you? But you can’t,” Hannibal murmured gently, tracking Will as he went to retrieve two tumblers from a cupboard and a bottle of whiskey. “The thing that you did. The witch that died. Your exile is just as self imposed as it is official. You think Agnes truly is right about you.”

Will set the whiskey and the tumblers down, taking a deep breath. “What, you psychic now as well? Sure you’re not actually one of us?”

Hannibal smiled, sliding into the worn, old kitchen chair Will nodded to. Will poured them both a drink and sat down opposite him, not meeting Hannibal’s gaze. A muscle in his jaw ticked.

“I… Agnes is right. I’m not like the rest of them. My magic isn’t good or pure and I can’t use it in the same way that the rest of the coven does. They’re healers, Seers, witches that can

help . Ever since my magic woke up, all it's done is destroy and cause chaos. Doing this work with Jack is the only time I've ever been able to use it for something positive."

"And you feel compelled to prove it can be used for good?" Hannibal guessed.

The snakes of the Ouroboros tattoo around Will's throat bobbed deliciously as he swallowed a sip of whiskey. "I've never met another Necromancer. But everyone fears us, even other witches. If this is finally my chance to prove to Agnes, to myself, that there's light somewhere in the darkness, I'd never forgive myself for not trying at least."

"You want Agnes's approval so badly?"

"I have never had anyone's approval," Will said very, very quietly. "But it's not just about Agnes. The witch that died, she… she was the only person who ever saw something worthwhile in me. And now she's not even here to see that I finally got to use my magic for something good."

"Tell me about her."

Will's head jerked up, his cerulean eyes slashed open and leaking with hurt when their gazes met. "I haven't even said her name since I was exiled."

"Who was she, Will?"

"She saved me," he began slowly, raising his whiskey to gulp back another mouthful. "I was a runaway. My magic was dormant until I was about fifteen, and I had no idea what had happened to me. I ran away from home after my dad and step-mom worked out there was something wrong with me a year later, and she found me. Knew exactly where to look for me. She'd been waiting for me, years and years of visions and dreams she said the Virgin Mary had sent her."

Hannibal nodded gently, sipping his own whiskey. "She brought you home with her?"

Will waved a hand into the air around them. "This is her house. She brought me here twenty-two years ago and it's been my home too ever since. She left this place to me in her will. She left everything to me."

"What was she to you? A lover? A friend?"

"I was her Ward, she'd always say. She'd been waiting her whole life for our paths to cross. She was my mentor, my friend, my surrogate mother… pain in my ass a lot of the time too, but I loved her all the same. It was never romantic. But she died for me, she loved me so much."

"The magic that was forbidden," Hannibal responded, his voice low and soft.

Will half-shrugged. "She taught me everything I know. Taught me the Old Tongue, had me summoning spirits every day, learning every rune and symbol and circle under the sun. I've read every book in this house countless times. She didn't shy away from the fact I was a Necromancer. She saw it as her life's work to help me master my magic, and the more I

learnt, the more I grew curious about what I could do. I grew tired of speaking to spirits, evoking the dead, channelling the chaos inside of me into what I'd begun to think was mediocre magic."

"Magic is boundless, eternal. You grew tired of it so quickly, mastering your powers?"

"You've said it yourself," Will grumbled. "There's no one else like me, no one who can do what I do. I have an excess of power, magic that tries to burst at the seams most days. Learning the basics bored me very quickly, and came to me too easily. I began to read more forbidden texts, seeking out knowledge that was buried for a reason. The more I used my magic, the more it seemed to grow, and strengthen. I wanted more. Wanted the impossible."

Hannibal merely waited for him to continue, realising Will was treading very carefully around what he was about to confess.

"You've heard of it, I'm guessing. The Ritual of Lazarus," Will breathed softly, nervously meeting Hannibal's eyes.

Hannibal swallowed back another mouthful of whiskey and nodded grimly. "I have."

"So you know that it's the one spell, the one ritual, those with magic like mine are forbidden from using. Agnes may not have liked the fact I used a transcension ritual to find Francesca in the Netherworld, but it pales in comparison to the taboo surrounding the Ritual of Lazarus."

"All those who have attempted it have perished," Hannibal said carefully. "And yet you still tried?"

"I was convinced I could make Death answer to me, bend to my will. I was obsessive. Once the idea formed, I couldn't eat, couldn't sleep for two whole years whilst I practised and learnt all I could. I did it all in secret so that M… Magdalena didn't know."

Hannibal's eyes softened as Will stumbled over her name, unable to help himself from reaching across the rickety wooden kitchen table and squeezing Will's limp hand where it lay between them. Will jumped as if he'd been shocked, but Hannibal tightened his grip, gaze boring into the witch's.

"Please, Will. Carry on."

Will took a deep breath, fixated on their joined hands and the electricity that seemed to jump between their skin. "My mother died when I was thirteen. I took her death very badly. I thought I could be the first Necromancer to ever successfully perform the ritual. And I have. I *did* ."

Hannibal frowned. "What do you mean? The ritual is deadly, Will."

Will smiled weakly. "I was twenty when I performed the Ritual of Lazarus on my mother and brought her back from the dead just long enough to speak to her. To see it had really worked. And then I started to die. Magdalena had found me as I was beginning the ritual but

she was too late. She couldn't stop me. So whilst I hung between this world and the next, the last few grains of sand in the hourglass, she gave up her own life so I could live. She poured out every last drop of magic she had to bring me back and took my place."

The professor remained silent, staring at the witch.

"I woke up back here, in my bed. Alana stayed and waited until I woke up, and she… she had foreseen what had happened, warned Magdalena of what I would do. The coven arrived at the graveyard where I had resurrected my mother and found us. Magdalena was dead, my mother… my mother was still sentient from what Alana described, and I was unconscious. They put my mother back in her coffin and buried her again and I… I wasn't even awake to stop them."

"What happened when you woke up back here?"

"Alana told me everything that had happened. Agnes and the rest of the council insisted she leave me be, but she refused. She'd always been kind to me since I was initiated into the coven when I was sixteen. She told me about what had happened with my mother, with Magdalena, and then told me I was to be summoned to the coven so my fate could be decided. I had broken the oldest Law, performed the most forbidden type of magic, and Magdalena paid the price."

"And they wanted you to atone for it," Hannibal murmured, still holding Will's hand fast in his. He swept his thumb over one of Will's knuckles which was inked with the rune of Ansuz. "Did they not realise you had already paid the price by losing the only person you cared for? By losing Magdalena?"

"I was a mess, afterwards. I still hadn't grieved my mother properly, and now Magdalena was gone. I went to the council a total shell of who I had been, dazed and mourning. They cast their votes, consulted the ancestors and well… you know the rest. I was exiled."

Hannibal frowned. "But there's more, isn't there?"

"Ever perceptive, Professor Lecter," Will smiled, sad and bitter. "Has anyone ever told you you'd make a good therapist?"

Hannibal's lips drew into a smirk, but he shook his head. "Please, Will. Indulge me."

"I should have died that night," Will confessed, downing the last of his whisky. "I should have died years before. I tried to kill myself when I fifteen, but it didn't work - it awoke my magic instead. The Law demands balance, Magdalena had always taught me that. I would have died if she hadn't offered herself up that night I resurrected my mother. I knew it should have been me instead. So I performed the ritual again."

The air in the kitchen grew still, dense and heavy from Will's confession.

"Not my mother again. Even I knew better than to bring her back a second time, and I still to this day don't know if she's still alive inside that coffin after the coven buried her again."

“So who, then? Magdalena?”

“Magdalena was cremated and the coven kept her ashes from me as part of my punishment - ashes can’t be resurrected. But I performed the spell on many others,” Will admitted. “I thought it would kill me, and I wanted it to. I started off here, to begin with. This place is an old plantation after all, and it’s certainly not short of unmarked graves. I performed the Ritual of Lazarus multiple times on the people that were buried in the grounds surrounding the house, bodies at the bottom of the Mississippi. They were all successful, but I didn’t die. Nothing more than a few dizzy spells and bleeding from my eyes and ears. An inconvenience, at most.”

“You were actively trying to kill yourself by performing the Lazarus ritual,” Hannibal deadpanned, his face slack in disbelief.

“I hated my magic, after Magdalena died,” Will muttered. “I thought it was only right that it kill me. But it didn’t, no matter how many people I brought back to life. It seemed my mother was the one exception to the rule, the only person who the Law wouldn’t demand the balance be restored for.”

“What you did should be impossible,” Hannibal said slowly. “This is… this is *unheard* of.”

Will smiled that sad, knowing smile once more. “The Ritual of Lazarus has killed every other witch who has ever attempted it, a spell so deadly it was forbidden for thousands and thousands of years. The downfall of every other Necromancer was that they had to give their life in exchange for the resurrected. I didn’t. I do not.”

“But how?”

“I lost count of how many times in those years after Magdalena died I performed the Ritual of Lazarus. I had no reason, no answer as to why every time I survived. I still have no idea to this day. All I learnt was that resurrecting my mother was the only time the ritual killed me, because our blood was too similar. Every account I’ve read of the Lazarus ritual describes how the Necromancer dies whether or not they’re related to the person they brought back to life.”

“Except for you. An exception to the rule. You have bent the will of the Law, Will,” Hannibal whispered in amazement, his eyes shining in awe.

“It’s not something I’m proud of,” Will responded icily, drawing his hand out from underneath Hannibal’s and immediately missing the warmth - not that he’d ever admit it. “And just because I told you about my exile doesn’t mean it changes anything. You’re not suddenly my friend, Hannibal.”

The wounded look on the older man’s face was like a kick to the gut, but Will simply pressed his lips together tightly and withdrew back into himself. He fastened the chains and the locks around his pain once more and slid the mask of crude effrontery back into place.

Before Hannibal could say another word, Will launched into discussing their plans for setting a trap for their killer, and Hannibal had no choice but to reluctantly drop the topic and discuss

their strategies. Will ignored the look of hurt and regret that flared in Hannibal's expression every time their gaze met.

Their plan was fairly simple; they would construct a fake crime scene (minus the murdered innocents, of course) and leave a message for their killer amongst the runes and magic circles Will would create. A tip off to Freddie Lounds and a few local news stations, and hopefully it would be enough to attract the attention of the mystery suspect they were pursuing. They would lure them out with an offer he wouldn't be able to refuse; a taunt that they had been able to summon the Morning Star, and they were willing to meet the killer to share their magic.

Plan in place, Will pointedly crossed his arms and eyed the front door. Hannibal, gracious as ever, politely took his leave, knowing Will's barriers were firmly back up and in place. But the hope in his heart was not crushed altogether; Will had confessed to him something he'd never told another living soul, and that information alone was enough to make Hannibal even more determined to change Will's mind about him and accept his companionship.

It had grown late into the night, the sun long gone and nothing but the noise of cicadas singing filling the dark sky outside of Will's house. As he was leaving, Eesha appeared from the shadows of the hallway, making a beeline for Hannibal and winding her way around his leg as she had done the first time he'd discovered the enormous, venomous snake. Will watched, baffled as she slithered all the way up Hannibal's body to coil herself around his shoulders.

"Sorry about that," Will apologised, wincing as Eesha's tongue flickered against Hannibal's jaw. "She's never this bold, I promise."

Hannibal cautiously stroked his palm over the smooth, cool scales of her body where she was entwined around his neck. "She's magnificent."

Will curtly uttered a command in the Old Tongue, Eesha's head lifting at the noise.

" *It's time for him to go. Get down, Eesha."*

If a snake could look mildly irritated, Hannibal imagined that Eesha did as she followed Will's order. "She understands you?"

Will narrowed his eyes. "Do *you* understand me?"

Hannibal watched the snake's huge body slide across the floor back to Will. He crouched down and offered out a hand, and she attached herself to him immediately, wrapping around his arm until she was settled across his shoulders.

"I have learnt the form of Aramaic you speak, yes. I understand it."

"Hmm," Will mused, assessing Hannibal with new found interest. "I've never met anyone who wasn't a witch who can speak the Old Tongue."

"Except for snakes?" Hannibal quipped, smiling softly.

Will rolled his eyes but smiled nonetheless. “Eesha isn’t just a snake, you know that. Familiars are special, in tune with forces the rest of us can’t see.”

“May I return tomorrow evening?” Hannibal asked, suddenly. “We could begin to practise the message we must leave to draw out our killer.”

Will shrugged, but inside his heart fluttered. “Sure. That would be fine, I guess.”

“Goodnight, Will,” Hannibal beamed gently.

Despite himself, Will returned the professor’s smile. “Goodnight. See you tomorrow, Hannibal.”

On the other side of New Orleans, Beverly screamed in horror as she stepped into the shower and turned the water on, only for the mechanisms to shudder and sputter forth fresh blood, gore and viscera spitting from the shower head and bathing her in red.

Jimmy awoke in a daze to find himself standing in his kitchen, the gleaming blade of a chef’s knife poised over his index finger where he’d splayed his hand on a wooden chopping board.

Outside of Jack’s bedroom window, the noise of the owls was growing unbearable, the hooting and screeching rising like a crescendo, accompanied by soft, wet *thuds* against the glass. Jack lumbered from bed, threw the curtains back, to see the tree outside his window filled with hundreds of shining eyes and feathered bodies. The glass was streaked with blood, and beneath the window lay an ever growing pile of mutilated rodents that had been savaged by talons and beaks, tails still twitching.

Will slept, blissfully unaware whilst the night filled with horrors for his friends.

Eleven

Chapter Notes

Nahum 1:2-3
The Lord is a jealous God and avenging,
The Lord is avenging and wrathful;
The Lord takes vengeance on his adversaries
and keeps wrath for his enemies.
The Lord is slow to anger and of great might,
and the Lord will by no means clear the guilty.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Will was exhausted. A bone deep kind of tired he usually staved off with coffee, however the tiredness would not shift despite how much caffeine he consumed. The most irritating part was that he'd slept so soundly last night - he couldn't remember a night so peaceful, so undisturbed. He'd learnt to survive off very little rest, and yet even after a full nine hours of deep, uninterrupted sleep, he was still yawning and fighting to keep his eyes open.

Jack hadn't summoned him to the lab or to another scene - Will wasn't sure there even would be any more murders, now that their killer had achieved their goal in summoning Belial - and his phone was unusually quiet. No missed calls from Jack or Bev or Jimmy. No messages. Will squinted suspiciously at the device and then out the window of the living room, expecting a car to come peeling down the driveway and Jack's heavy fist pounding at the door any minute now.

But there was nothing but peaceful silence. Calm. Will released a shaky breath he didn't know he'd been holding.

He paced over to the sofa, flinging himself down and mindlessly petting Miguel's head when the cat jumped up next to him and headbutted him lightly for attention, rumbling purrs immediately erupting from the creature as he began to stroke it. Eesha was curled into a tight ball opposite him on the armchair Hannibal had sat in when he'd watched over Will the other night.

His eyes were drifting close before he even realised he was dozing back off to sleep.

Lips, skimming over the pulse in his neck whilst dexterous, agile fingers stroked over the nape of his neck and down his spine. Resting just at the top of his tailbone.

"Please," he whispered, shaky and nervous.

The hands drifted lower, palms skimming over his ass, teeth grazing over his Adam's apple.

“Tell me what you want,” the husky voice encouraged him, hands squeezing the globes of his ass slowly, almost cruelly.

“You,” Will whimpered. “I just want you. In any kind of way you’ll let me have you.”

The chuckle was deep, soft, and made him shudder against the warm body he pressed against. “You know I would let you have anything you want.”

“I want it all,” Will confessed, the words heavy and weighted on his tongue. “All of you. All the time.”

“Shall I decide for you then, darling?”

The image of Hannibal materialised in front of him, shadowy and smirking like sin, eyes drinking Will down like he was the elixir of life itself.

Will nodded slowly.

Large, calloused hands stroked down his ribs, fingertips tracing over his tattoos that shifted over his skin with every heaving breath. Hannibal held him by the hips and tugged their naked bodies flush, arms encircling Will like a vice. He kissed him, deep and dark and heady, and Will groaned against his lips, heat sizzling between every inch of skin that touched Hannibal’s. His tongue and lips danced with the older man’s, surrendering to Hannibal and letting him control their kiss.

“So beautiful,” Hannibal panted against his mouth, then began savagely kissing open mouthed against his throat and down his chest, descending his belly as he sank into a crouch at Will’s feet.

Will gasped when his tongue licked a broad, flat stripe over the crucifix tattoo Will bore on his right hip. “Hannibal.”

“Let me taste you. It drives me mad, thinking about all this skin you constantly hide and cover. I’d sear the taste of you into my tongue forever if I could,” Hannibal whispered against the dip of the V of Will’s hips.

Will tipped his head back, eyes slipping shut, and grinned salaciously. “You think about me often?”

The groan that came from Hannibal’s throat as he knelt before Will, clutching his hips with warm, broad hands, sent shivers down his spine. “Will. Will… how could I not? How could my mind not be consumed with you? Everything is about you. Everything is for you.”

“Oh God...” Will released with a shuddering breath.

“There is nothing but you. There has never been anything but you.”

Will moaned, loud and wanton, when Hannibal’s lips skimmed over the straining length of his cock. His cock twitched desperately at the sensation, needing more.

“Please, Hannibal,” Will whispered, lowering his head to look at the man kneeling in reverence before him. “Want your mouth on me. Suck me.”

Hannibal obeyed the request immediately. He took Will into his mouth expertly, as if he’d been doing so for years and years. As if he already knew exactly what Will liked - how much pressure, how to rub and lave his tongue against the underside of the head of Will’s cock, how to hollow his cheeks and suck as he bobbed his head up.

“That’s it,” Will gasped. “Just like that.”

Hannibal groaned around Will’s cock in his mouth, his throat relaxing as he took Will in even further. He rutted his hips against Hannibal’s face, deep throating him as saliva pooled in Hannibal’s mouth and made the heat nearly unbearable. The filthy, squelching sounds as he fucked Hannibal’s throat had Will’s toes curling, his spine stiffening and his eyes beginning to roll in his head.

“Hannibal - Hannibal, I’m coming - ”

The words died in his mouth as Hannibal swallowed repeatedly around his length deep in his throat, the sensation alone cutting Will’s breath off and pleasure ripping through him. His orgasm was wrenched from him, stars flaring behind his eyes and blood pounding through his veins as he whimpered, cock twitching sporadically as he spilled down Hannibal’s throat.

Hannibal pulled back with a gasp, spit running down his chin. He rose to his feet and kissed Will, dirty and obscene, but so perfect.

“Hands and knees, face down,” Hannibal growled against his lips. “You can show me how much you want me by coming again whilst I fuck you.”

Will woke with a startled, gasping yell. He sat up right, chest heaving, and his cock throbbing in the confines of his clothes.

Oh *fuck* . Oh fucking hell. How could he have just had a fucking sex dream about Hannibal? He wanted nothing to do - well perhaps *nothing* to do with him was a little strong, as he had actually found Hannibal’s presence enjoyable and comforting last night as they’d sat at his kitchen table drinking whiskey.

But being sexually attracted to the man? That was out of the question. He couldn’t start seeing Hannibal that way, even if he was painfully attractive and charming and genuinely interested in Will and patient and kind and -

Oh, this was bad. Will dragged a hand over his face, cursing softly under his breath. All he could think about was those amber eyes, tilted smirking lips, the chiselled cheek bones and broad shoulders that narrowed off so deliciously to that tapered waist… all topped off by that silken, purring voice that was so delightfully accented.

Will did the only thing he knew would get his mind off of the horrendous predicament he found himself in. He picked up his cell and called a certain witch who was just as eager to use Will as Will was to use him.

Raphael's fingers threaded through Will's curls, tugging his head back as Will pressed open mouthed kisses along the other witch's inner thigh. "Will."

Will sighed, pausing in his ministrations to meet the hazel eyes looking at him expectantly. He rested his head against Raphael's toned thigh, blinking slowly. "What is it?"

"Before we fuck each other mindless, can I at least ask why now?" Raphael smirked, sitting up a little to brace himself on his elbows as he let Will's hair go. "You haven't called me in seven months, then I saw you at that awful meeting yesterday - now you finally decide you want me again?"

Will held back another heavy sigh of frustration. "I called you," - a kiss to Raphael's hip - "because I know" - lips skimming over skin - "that you don't ask stupid questions. No strings attached, no expectations, remember?"

Raphael rolled his eyes. "Alright, but you have to at least admit how it was a little odd that you've been avoiding me for so many months, and now out of the blue you want to sleep together again?"

"Do I need to explain myself to you? This is supposed to be easy between us," Will murmured, fingertips trailing dangerously close to Raphael's straining cock, flushed and weeping against his lower abdomen.

"You do, actually," Raphael stated flatly.

His lithe form rose up, rolling Will and pinning him beneath him, kissing him fiercely. "Why have you been avoiding me? I thought you'd found someone else to entertain you, someone else to share your bed with. Did you get bored of me?"

Will quirked an eyebrow at the other witch. "This is sounding awfully jealous and insecure coming from the one who didn't want us to be serious in the first place, and told me we could only ever be fuck buddies."

Will thrust his hips up, grinding his erection into Raphael's. "So are we going to fuck, or not?"

Raphael gripped Will's wrists together over his head, pinning the inked appendages to the bed. "Answer my question, Will."

"I didn't get bored of you. I didn't find someone else. Now, please, can we - "

"Why so long? I'm used to you going off the radar for a month or two at a time, but never this long. You left me in the dark."

"Raphael," Will muttered, nipping at the other man's sharp, lightly stubbled jaw with his teeth, "I was not avoiding you. I've been busy. You're here now, aren't you? I'm sorry you didn't hear from me for such a long period - let me just make you feel good, hm? It's not as if I've forgotten what you like, even after seven months."

Raphael's expression softened a little, and he dipped his head to kiss Will tenderly. It made Will's stomach churn, thinking of his dream of Hannibal. How the professor had *devoured* him with those dreamt up kisses, starving for Will and nothing but Will. The want and the possession had radiated from Hannibal like something radioactive in his dream, and the way Raphael kissed him now made Will want to throw the other witch from him and scramble off the bed.

But this would have to do. It would have to suffice. Will couldn't have Hannibal. He didn't *want* to want Hannibal, and fucking Raphael had always been inconsequential, easy. They had a mutual understanding. They could fuck whoever else they wanted in between, coming together whenever it suited them over the years. Raphael had been an on and off again lover for the last twelve years.

It was secret, of course. Not a single member of the coven knew about their affairs. Raphael would be as good as banished himself if it ever got out that he was sleeping with the exiled witch. Will didn't care - he didn't need anyone to know who shared his bed, and it mattered none to him that he'd never be accepted back into a coven he'd never wanted to be a part of anyway. So what if they offered protection? So what if they offered family, understanding, companionship? Will had once dreamt of life with Raphael, when their relationship had first begun, living amongst the other witches in the coven with Raphael as his lover. He thought of it even after what they had done to Will in the wake of Magdalena's death. The very thought of being around those similar to him made something akin to longing twitch in Will's chest, his heart hollow and empty after Magdalena had died. But then Raphael had made it incredibly clear they could never be anything more than each other's dirty secrets.

Which was exactly why Will would not fall victim to Raphael's attempts to soften him up, to make him a mindless, panting idiot after the stunning hazel eyed witch.

Will had fallen for it once, allowed a kernel of hope to take root, and then Raphael had so curtly reminded Will of the reality of their situation. Will was exiled. The coven was Raphael's family. Will was evil, and dark, and his magic was twisted and murderous. Raphael was the light, imbedded with goodness, his magic that of healing.

They couldn't ever be together. Will had shut those dreams down a long time ago, buried them and forgot about them. He owed Raphael nothing. They fucked each other when they felt like it, and that was the way it had been for the last twelve years and would be until one of them walked away from the other for good.

"I missed you," Raphael confessed between heated kisses as their bodies writhed together. "Missed this. Been thinking about you, mi cielo."

Will held Raphael's face between his hands from where he lay underneath the other witch, clenching his teeth. "You know I don't like it when you call me that."

Raphael laughed, brushing it off. " ¿Pero por qué?"

"Because I'm not your anything, Raphael," Will muttered, turning his head to the side as Raphael tried to kiss him again.

“You are,” Raphael insisted, diving his head down to suck a dark bruise at the pale skin of Will’s neck, just above his Ouroboros tattoo. “My heaven, with those big blue eyes like the sky. I find heaven inside of you, Will.”

He didn’t know why, but tears pricked in his eyes and a lump formed in his throat. Will blinked the tears away quickly, his heart clenching and eyes stinging. He was no one’s heaven, no one’s beloved or darling.

He wanted to push Raphael away, tell him to get dressed and leave. But he didn’t. The image of wicked amber eyes flashed in his mind, the sight of Hannibal on his knees in worship of Will, and Will nearly gagged, betrayal churning with the nausea in his gut. He would erase the image of the things that hadn’t even transpired between Hannibal and himself with the burning touch of Raphael’s heated skin and lips.

“Shut up,” Will demanded. “You talk so much. Are you going to fuck me, or not?”

“Oh, that’s how you want it tonight, is it?” Raphael grinned lazily as he raked his teeth over the Death’s Head moth tattooed over Will’s heart.

“It is,” Will gritted out, his fingers encircling Raphael’s length and stroking firmly.

“As much as I love it when I’m riding you or you’re bending me in half,” Raphael mouthed against his ribs, “there’s nothing quite like watching you squirm as I fuck you.”

Will nearly rolled his eyes, but a small part of him appreciated the fact that Raphael was happy to follow Will’s lead, Will’s desires, every time. The other witch never seemed to care who topped, as long as they both got off.

“Hurry up,” Will insisted, breathing raggedly. “I already prepped myself before you got here.”

Raphael’s mouth turned down. “What a shame. You know how much I enjoy opening you up with my fingers and mouth.”

“Saved you a job,” Will rebutted, shifting to place himself on his hands and knees, resting his cheek against a pillow on the bed.

“You want me to take you like this?” Raphael purred, skimming a palm down Will’s exposed back. “I won’t be able to see those pretty blue eyes.”

Will said nothing of the fact he wanted to be fucked like this because it was how his sex dream with Hannibal had been going before he woke up, and he wanted to pretend it was the professor fucking him, and not Raphael. He didn’t want to see Raphael’s face, see his olive skin shining with sweat as he worked himself up into a state driving into Will relentlessly.

He felt the nudge of the head of Raphael’s cock against his entrance when the very loud knocking on the front door from downstairs interrupted them. They both went still, the world seeming to pause in its rotation momentarily, and then the loud knock came again.

“Expecting someone?” Raphael asked, teasing his member at Will’s hole and dipping in ever so slightly.

The strangled moan of pleasure at the intrusion ripped from Will’s throat.

A knock again downstairs, followed by a muffled: “ *Will?* ”

Hannibal. Shit - he *was* expecting Hannibal, totally forgetting he’d agreed the professor could return tonight and further discuss their plans, finalise the arrangements on how they would draw their killer out.

Will sat upright, only for Raphael to smother Will’s back with his chest, pressing him back down onto the bed.

“Ignore them,” Raphael encouraged him, his voice low and tempting, teeth scraping over the shell of Will’s ear. “I’m not letting you out of this bed.”

“Excuse me?” Will asked incredulously. “Get off me, Raphael. You need to leave.”

Raphael teasingly pushed past Will’s rim, and *fucking hell* , it felt so good, so much that Will moaned and his eyes rolled in his head. “You don’t really want me to go.”

“Raphael - ”

“Will? Are you home? The front door is unlocked.”

Hannibal’s voice drifted up the stairs, loud and clear. Will’s bedroom door was wide open, and so very close to the wide expanse of the stairway at the top of the hall.

Raphael pushed in again a little, reaching around and stroking Will’s weeping member. “Who’s your friend, mi cielo?”

Will didn’t mean to be so forceful, but this wasn’t a fucking game; Raphael wasn’t listening. He didn’t bother physically pushing Raphael off of him, letting his magic do the work for him. It sprang forth, exhilarated to be used every single time, and threw Raphael away from him so forcefully he shot across the room from the bed, falling to the floor with a ear-shattering racket.

“Shit,” Will whispered, wide eyed when he realised just how much he’d let his magic slip.

Raphael lay unmoving on the floor, eyes frozen and staring ahead uselessly. His chest rose and fell steadily, which was the only relief Will could garner from the situation as he heard pounding footsteps rushing up the stairs.

Hannibal halted in the open doorway, wide eyed and surveying the scene before him. Will, kneeling on his mattress stark naked, and the immobile body of Raphael on the floorboards between them, just as nude.

Hannibal blinked, once, twice. Will felt just as paralysed as Raphael.

“Hannibal - ”

“It’s - Will, what - I’m sorry, I appear to have intru… is that Raphael? What’s wrong with him?”

Will scrambled into action then, snatching his underwear from the floor and tugging them back up over his hips and draping a blanket over Raphael’s statuesque form on the floor, frozen but still breathing. Will grunted as he heaved Raphael into his arms, carrying the witch back to bed and gingerly laying him back down.

“I… can you give me a minute? Just - I’ll meet you downstairs.”

Hannibal opened his mouth to respond but then his gaze locked on the purple bruise Raphael had sucked onto Will’s neck and shut his mouth. He nodded once then turned and promptly walked back downstairs.

Will buried his head in his hands and smothered the scream that tried to break loose, shuddering under the weight of subduing the magic that clawed and bit under his skin, demanding to be released after Will had let a fraction of it slip forth to strike Raphael.

Hannibal said nothing as Will appeared in the doorway of the living room where he waited for him. He looked paler than usual, however his cheeks were still flaming pink with embarrassment. He was fully clothed now, shoulders hunched forwards as if trying to make himself smaller. He settled himself opposite Hannibal in an adjacent armchair, refusing to meet the professor’s eyes as Eesha appeared from around the corner of a bookcase, slithering towards Will eagerly.

Hannibal admired the gleam of the snake’s body as she curled around Will’s arms, resting loosely around his shoulders with her head over his chest.

“Sorry about that,” Will grunted, looking everywhere but at Hannibal. “I, ah, got my timings wrong. Thought you wouldn’t be here for a while.”

“Will - what’s wrong with him? What happened?”

“He’s uh, temporarily paralysed. It was my magic - I acted in a panic when I realised you were here and he wasn’t stopping so I just…”

“What do you mean, he wasn’t stopping?” Hannibal said slowly, his voice too calm. *Too* smooth.

Will grimaced. “Well, I don’t have to explain to you what you walked in on, we were clearly about to - to, you know. I told him to get off me, but he was just messing around, so I let my magic deal with it. I didn’t realise I’d frozen him though, that part was unintentional. I only meant to give him a little shove so I could get dressed before you had the chance to walk in on us.”

“Will - was he hurting you?”

Will's eyes were like saucers in his head, mouth agape slightly. "No - *no* . Raphael would never. He was just - ah, in the moment, or whatever. I just panicked and… he'll be alright. The magic will wear off pretty soon, and anyway, it's not the first time he's asked me to paralyse him whilst we - sorry. Sorry, fuck, I…"

Silence flooded the living room.

"This is awkward," Will blurted out. "You walked in on me having sex. You saw me naked. Raphael is upstairs paralysed because I freaked out. Can we just pretend none of this is happening?"

Hannibal swallowed thickly. "Are you alright, Will?"

"Me?" Will asked, shocked. "I'm fine, Hannibal. It's not how it looked or sounded, I promise."

"His choice to ignore your request for him to stop concerns me."

"Hannibal - it's not like that. We just - he's an asshole sometimes but never like that. He must have thought you'd leave, and I… I'm sorry. You must think I'm some sort of fucking pervert."

Hannibal shook his head. "No, Will. I apologise for intruding, I… I truly did not mean to walk in on you like that. It's just when I heard the noise of a body hitting the floor, I assumed you were hurt. It's none of my business what your… proclivities with Raphael are."

Will flushed a darker shade of red. "I really am sorry you had to walk in and see that. I lost track of time and… ok. I'm just going to shut up now, because none of what I'm saying is making this sound even remotely acceptable or better."

Hannibal quirked a brow. "Raphael?"

"What about him?"

"He's part of the coven."

"I'm aware."

"The coven that exiled you. The coven whose existence you hold a large amount of resentment towards, and rightly so."

"Raphael and I have very clear… boundaries. His status as part of the coven's Council has nothing to do with our arrangement."

Did they have clear boundaries? Will wondered the moment he said the words aloud. Raphael called him things like *mi cielo* , had told Will tonight that he missed him, and was obviously so insecure about the fact Will had ignored him for seven months.

"I'm merely surprised, I suppose. I didn't think the two of you exactly seemed… amicable, yesterday when we met with the Council."

Will's jaw clenched and he glanced away. "We have an arrangement, Hannibal. That's all. It benefits us both, but stops at the bedroom door."

A creak at the top of the stairs made both of them freeze and go quiet. Slow, unsteady steps sounded as Raphael descended to the ground floor of the house and walked to the doorway of the vast living room. He stood at the entrance, looking dazed and queasy, but something in his eyes hardened at the sight of Hannibal sat across from Will.

Will got to his feet immediately, going to Raphael. He placed a hand over Raphael's forehead, shoulder's relaxing when the feverish heat had cooled beneath his touch as Raphael's body worked off the magic that had paralysed him in place not even an hour ago.

"It's best if you leave," Will muttered. "I'm sorry about before. I didn't mean for my magic to slip like that."

Raphael shook his head, raising a hand to stroke Will's curls and smiling furtively at the other witch. "I'll live. I rather enjoyed the last time you used your magic to render me helpless, if I remember rightly."

"Raphael - " Will warned him, but he carried on talking.

"Laying there, frozen, whilst you bounced on my - "

"Time for you to leave," Will announced very loudly, interrupting him and spinning him towards the door.

Raphael immediately took the opportunity to twist Will in his arms when the smaller man touched him, claiming Will's mouth possessively and kissing him. He held Will close to him, forcing Will's spine to arch, and Raphael stared Hannibal dead in the eyes from across the living room as he embraced Will.

The wood in the arms of the chair Hannibal sat upon creaked as he gripped it so tightly the wood protested. Raphael broke the kiss as he saw the dark, cold malice spreading across the planes of Hannibal's face, his eyes so icy they held an unnatural fire of their own.

"Call me," Raphael breathed against Will's cheek, still looking at Hannibal. "Let's pick up from where we left off, hmm?"

" *Out* ," Will hissed, shoving Raphael towards the front door. "Fucking prick."

Raphael merely chuckled, glancing Hannibal's way one more time, before winking at Will and sauntering towards the front door. "Don't leave it so long next time, mi cielo."

Silence rang out through the house again as soon as the front door closed. The soft mewling coming from Miguel as he rounded a corner and rubbed himself against Will's legs broke it, and the witch sighed in defeat.

"Come on, I'll show you what I had in mind for our trap. I hope you don't mind a little gore, Hannibal," Will grumbled as he headed out of the living room. "The circles I had in mind for the trap will need some entrails."

Hannibal gazed at the spot where Raphael had been for a moment longer and then stood gracefully, following Will out into the hallway. “Oh, I don’t mind at all. I’m sure I have seen worse than a little blood and offal in all my years researching magic and the occult.”

Will threw him a lazy smile over his shoulder as they walked down the hall to the back of the house, and Hannibal felt something burst inside of him at the sight of that smile.

“I’m glad you can stomach me and my magic, at least,” Will said softly, more vulnerable and tender than he had perhaps intended to sound.

Hannibal caught up to him and brushed aside a stray, errant curl across Will’s forehead with a carefulness that made Will’s heart throb.

“I do not merely stomach you and your magic,” Hannibal murmured. “It astonishes me. I’m hungry for the very essence of it.”

Will stilled as they reached a closed door further down the hallway, his hand resting on the handle. His eyes seemed to glow, they were so brilliantly blue in the dim light this far down the shadowed hallway of the plantation.

“You say the strangest things,” Will whispered, his breath getting caught somewhere in his airways, the intensity with which Hannibal was looking at him making his legs feel like jelly. “Most people run when they see the way Death is threaded through me.”

Hannibal shook his head slowly. “Is that why you keep Raphael around? Because you found one person, at last, who does not cower from what you are? Someone you think stomachs your nature, as you put it?”

Will’s face twisted with something strange, a concoction of regret and embarrassment. “Can you blame me? It’s difficult to find many living beings who willingly wish to be around me - especially other witches. They sense the darkness I harbour far more than those without magic, and quite frankly, it gets a little tedious having the Dead as your only company.”

“It doesn’t have to be that way,” Hannibal said softly, stepping ever so closer to Will to crowd the witch against the door he was still holding the handle of. “I told you that your exile is as self-imposed as it is official.”

Will narrowed his eyes. “Is that so? Normal people fear me, Hannibal. Hell, a few weeks before you arrived in New Orleans, they staked crosses at the top of my driveway and nailed passages from the Old Testament about necromancers into the mailbox. Other witches can sense the mark against me from my exile - any witch within a hundred mile radius would turn their back on me.”

Hannibal frowned, and Will felt the hairs on the back of his neck raising. “I do not fear you, Will. I don’t believe you deserve to be shunned and cast out the way you have been by your own kind.”

“So what then?” Will laughed bitterly. “You saying you want to be my *friend* , Professor Lecter? Seeing as no other sorry fuck would dream of such a thing? You really are

unhinged."

"They are ignorant," Hannibal replied bluntly. "They do not have the ability to see past the fear-mongering and the myth that surrounds what you are, around your magic. They don't see the *person* , Will. I may not have known you for very long, but I am…"

"Stop," Will protested, shutting his eyes. "Please don't start talking about these things when you walked in on that train wreck of a situation with Raphael upstairs earlier, and I'm about to ask you to help me perform a ritual that's going to end with us covered in guts. I can't do this right now, Hannibal."

"Understood," the older man answered gently. "I just hope you won't forget I would never spurn you as others have. I think you are extraordinary."

Will gave him a grim look, but there was softness dwelling somewhere in his eyes at Hannibal's words. "Let's see if you still think that by the end of tonight. This won't be pretty, Hannibal."

Hannibal merely smiled pleasantly, head tilted slightly, and stepped back from where he'd crowded Will against the door. Will immediately missed the warmth, the way the air around them seemed to curve over their bodies and create their own little bubble.

"Lead the way, Will."

Chapter End Notes

Mi cielo - literally translates from Spanish to English as "my heaven"/"my sky", but used as a term of endearment similar to "my darling/dear".

¿Pero por qué? - But why?

Thank you so much to everyone who has left comments and kudos recently, I appreciate it so much! I'm sorry I haven't managed to reply to many comments lately, I've been so busy with work that I'm just about squeezing in enough time to write this fic.
Also, I just want to apologise for every stupid grammar mistake/typo in this fic :)))) I often re-read what I've posted days/weeks later and spot so many errors that annoy tf out of me - but hey, no beta, we die like Abigail right? :))

Twelve

Chapter Notes

> **Matthew 25:41**
> *Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.*

See the end of the chapter for more notes

"Knife, please."

"It's almost as if we are in an operating theatre."

Will rolled his eyes. "The knife, Hannibal. Go live out your surgeon fantasies some other time, I need you to focus."

"My apologies, Will. It's rather difficult when you are half naked and covered in blood."

Will pursed his lips at the professor, outstretched hand still waiting for the blade. Hannibal handed it to him, his own skin slippery with the shiny red liquid. Will grasped the blade in his hand, and slit his hand open across the tattoo of the eye on his palm. The tattoo was marred with dozens of older raised lines of scar tissue.

" *Turtun d'ḥudā,* " Will whispered, letting his blood seep over the symbol of twin serpents twisting around a crescent moon at his bare feet. " *Maṭlathā d'līlā, anath menhūa 'im anā.* "

Will crouched to the floor, holding his clenched fist above his open mouth as he let his own blood drip onto his tongue. The purple candles around the circle drawn in pasty white chalk began to flicker rapidly and Hannibal felt the softest breeze slip over his wet, blood smeared skin.

They were in a small, dark room that Will seemed to reserve purely for casting magic circles and performing rituals and spells. The door was painted with seals of protection on the outside, wards and spells scratched and burnt into the wood. On the other side, the door bore containment seals, runes to bind and hold. Inside was a single window, the pale netted curtains drawn shut and making what was left of the setting sun a weak, strained thing.

The walls were bare, except for the rune of Chaos painted in black on each of the four surfaces. The runes were large circles bracketed by dozens of thinner circles outside of them, and within Will had painted the jagged ninety-degree lines that met at fractured points, the same lines mirrored opposite, destined to never touch and always orbit just out of reach.

There was not an inch on the floorboards that was not covered in old, faded magic circles. Years and years of chalk and blood and salt ingrained into the wood. The very floor itself

seemed to writhe with energy, with the decades of magic Will had poured forth in this room.

Most startling of all was the lone human skull that sat on a small table in the East corner of the room.

Hannibal had eyed it with fascination, but kept his mouth shut when Will had stripped off his shirt and started to draw chalk runes into the aged floorboards. Watching the tattoos flex and ripple over Will's pale skin had been far more interesting than the human skull looming in the corner.

Hannibal had understood why Will had divested his clothes to save at least his shirt when the witch had left the room and then returned with a heavy sack, slicing the sack open to reveal the freshly slaughtered goat within - Hannibal didn't dare ask where on earth Will had procured an entire goat from. The witch had cut the animal open from throat to tail, letting the entire contents of its body spill forth over his bare feet and across the floorboards. At some point in the last hour, Hannibal had ended up covered in the creature's blood and guts too.

Suddenly, Will spat his blood back out onto the symbol of the serpents and the moon, saliva and blood hitting the floor. " *D'mā d'demī, ḥabrā d'nafshī, anā qaryitā lukh lā* ."

The words flowed from Will's mouth like water, like silk over bare skin, the Old Tongue sounding ethereal, otherworldly from the witch as it filled the room. It made Hannibal shudder, made the hairs on his arms raise.

Will tipped his head back, closing his eyes. When he opened them again, Hannibal saw the pitch black that had taken over, the entirety of his eyes engulfed in darkness. Hannibal's breath caught in his throat as Will reached for the body of the goat, knife plunging into the buck's neck and severing it from its body with a vicious slide and swipe.

" *D'mā d'Khukhbā d'nahrā l'h d'anā m'shal* ," Will rasped, holding aloft the goat's head into the air. " *Hu nahar lenafshēh. Atrūh anā qlā."*

The gore splattered from its neck into Will's lap, splashing every inch of his skin in its blood. The stench of copper burned harder with the flames as they leapt higher into the air.

The shadows appeared from thin air itself. It looked like black mist, vapours gradually forming from nothing until they were curling around Will, caressing over the blood and entrails Will was surrounded by. They sank into the head of the goat, and Will opened his mouth wide, letting the tendrils of black smoke curl down his throat through his mouth.

Hannibal had never seen such an erotic sight. Will, eyes as dark as night, kneeling on the floor and covered head to toe in blood, as he willingly allowed the shadows he'd summoned into existence to slither past his parted lips and inside of him. Arousal stirred in his gut, fingers twitching as he clamped down on the desire to throw himself at the witch and lick the clotting blood from his collar bones and pectorals.

Will moaned softly, slumping forwards and releasing the goat head. His head dropped, chin to chest, and when he looked up again his eyes were clear. Gone was the ink-like blackness

that spread so quickly, replaced with the vivid blue that haunted Hannibal in every moment he was away from Will. His breathing was ragged, fingertips digging into the floorboards to ground himself.

He looked over at Hannibal, dazed and swaying where he still knelt on the floor. The shadows vanished slowly, sinking back to whatever realm they had come from, and Will shuddered as if something inside of him had scraped over his bones. Hannibal carefully stretched his arm out, gripping Will's chin in his fingers and forcing the witch to look at him.

"Will," he breathed, astonished and wide eyed. "It's beautiful."

Will blinked slowly, Hannibal's words sinking in over the course of seconds that dragged like hours. "Beautiful?"

"Yes," Hannibal whispered in amazement. "I'm honoured. I have never… it is beyond words, the way you wield your magic. What you can do."

Will smiled warily. "You think so?"

Hannibal simply nodded, thumb sweeping over Will's lower lip, stained red and coppery. "It is everything."

The words struck a chord deep inside of Will - God, this was so similar to the dream he'd had earlier. What was it that Hannibal had said? *"There is nothing but you. There has never been anything but you."*

Will didn't know why he did it. Maybe it was the magic throbbing through his veins as his heart thumped in his chest. Maybe it was the way Hannibal was looking at him, with pure adoration. Hell, maybe it was even the blood loss from the ritual. But whatever it was, Will sucked Hannibal's thumb into his mouth from where it rested on his plump bottom lip. He licked his tongue over the digit, sucking *hard* when he saw Hannibal's pupils dilate to the size of saucers.

The kiss was inevitable; Will was prepared to drag Hannibal to him, to crawl into the older man's lap, but he didn't have to. Hannibal met him halfway, with as much hunger as Will doled out. Their arms came around each other, still slick and coated in a mixture of goat blood and Will's own blood. Hannibal held him fast, allowing Will to straddle his legs on either side of him as he climbed into Hannibal's lap. The position was perfect for aligning their hips, and the slow grind of Will's core against his own had Hannibal biting down on Will's lower lip, hands grabbing the witch's sharp waist and helping him rock down against his rapidly growing erection.

"Shouldn't be doing this," Will mouthed against his jaw, tasting of blood and salt.

It was divine.

"Why not?" Hannibal rasped, biting back the rough noise that grew in his throat as Will rocked against him once more, heat seeping into Hannibal's groin.

“Because you’re… we’re supposed to be working together,” Will said breathlessly, tipping his head back and giving Hannibal access to his throat.

He took it immediately, lips going to the spot where Raphael had left a bruise earlier and sucking Will’s skin between his teeth viciously, covering Raphael’s mark with his own. Will moaned at the sensation, fingers disrupting the soft golden strands of hair streaked with grey on Hannibal’s head.

“We barely know each other,” Will continued. “Correction; *I* barely know anything about *you*.”

“What do you want to know?” Hannibal asked, kissing greedily over the pale, blood streaked skin before him. “Ask me. I’ll tell you whatever you want to know.”

“Where are you from?” Will gasped as Hannibal lowered him to the floor, knocking his knees apart to settle his heavy body between Will’s spread legs.

“Lithuania.”

“Family?”

“None. They’re all dead.”

“How?”

“They were murdered.”

Will stilled beneath him. “Hannibal…”

“I told you I’d tell you whatever you want to know, Will,” Hannibal reminded him, looking upon Will’s breathtaking, bloody face in awe. “Do you still wish to ask questions?”

“I do,” Will breathed. “But not like this. Not here, not when you’re looking at me like that.”

“And how am I looking at you?” Hannibal teased, fingernails pressing ever so slightly against one of Will’s nipples, the pain sending a jolt of electricity through him and making him gasp in a twisted mix of pleasure and discomfort.

Will swallowed, thinking back to the dream he’d had once again. The words were tumbling from his mouth before he could think, before he could stop them;

“You look at me as though you’d let me have anything that I want.”

“I would,” Hannibal replied immediately. “I want you to know that.”

“And if I want to stop? To not let this go any further?”

“Then it won’t,” Hannibal replied, sombre and serious all of a sudden, his hands retreating from Will’s skin.

Will smiled slowly. “Don’t take it the wrong way, Professor. It’s not that I don’t want to - it’s not even the fact we’re covered in blood. I just don’t particularly want you to fuck me next to a goat corpse, plus I still have to close the circle.”

Hannibal shut his eyes and drew in a deep breath, steeling himself. “Of course. Of course.”

Hannibal was intimately aware of the noises of the shower shutting off, Will’s sigh from behind the bathroom door, the squeak of glass as skin was rubbed against it to clear the mirror from the steam of the hot water. Hannibal imagined Will stood before the mirror, dragging a towel over his hair, blinking at his reflection.

Hannibal had not seen even a fraction of the huge plantation, but out of every room he had been in, the bathroom upstairs opposite Will’s bedroom was the only room that contained a mirror. The whole house was devoid of mirrors and reflective surfaces, and judging from the amount of warding and runes of protection littered all over the building, Will’s aversion to mirrors was not rooted in his dislike of his own reflection.

Another piece of the mystery, the intrigue, that was Will Graham.

Hannibal waited for Will in the library, a large and spacious room at the end of the hallway upstairs, filled with strange objects and curiosities of all types. He was inspecting a tiny skull that seemed to be a part of a collection of bones on a shelf when Will returned from the bathroom.

He was dressed in a pair of loose fitting pants and a long sleeved shirt that hid most of the tattoos on his arms, but the gaping neckline revealed the edges of inked shapes and symbols that made Hannibal’s mouth water. Will’s hair was damp, tousled and messy around his face, skin clean and devoid of blood after his shower.

“You have quite the collection,” Hannibal murmured in way of greeting, gesturing to the tiny skull in his hand. “What creature did this skull belong to?”

Will approached him, tenderly trailing a finger over the skull on the palm of Hannibal’s hand. He tried not to become too still or let his breath catch at Will’s proximity.

“A bat,” Will said softly, flicking his eyes up to look at Hannibal. “I collect bones, as you’ve probably guessed after the ah, gator skull escapade the other day. They come in handy for rituals, useful for channelling Death and… sorry, I’m rambling.”

Hannibal looked back to the shelf of bones and skulls and spotted Will’s latest addition, the gator skull alarmingly large in comparison to the tiny bat cranium he held. He tried and failed miserably not to shudder as Will’s fingers brushed his hand as he dropped his arm back to his side, turning to head to the well worn, sage loveseat by the fireplace.

“I thought downstairs was impressive,” Hannibal commented as he followed him. “But this library is truly something.”

And it was; the library was huge, rows and rows and walls and walls entirely dedicated to books of all shapes and sizes, tomes and manuscripts, Grimoires and every kind of holy book Hannibal could think of.

He tilted his head at the open Bible resting on the arm of the loveseat Will sat on. Will shifted uncomfortably, closing the book carefully and placing it on the side table by the loveseat.

“Your Catholicism makes you uncomfortable?” Hannibal asked boldly, sitting himself opposite Will on a matching loveseat.

Will shook his head, rubbing at his tired eyes. “No. I just… I know how it looks, how it seems - a Catholic Necromancer. Sounds like some sort of joke, doesn’t it?”

Hannibal shrugged. “You are closer to God than anyone else.”

Will pulled a face immediately. “How so?”

“Without running the risk of sounding blasphemous, who else but Christ was able to raise the dead?” Hannibal offered, a small smile playing around his lips.

“My magic is not Christ-like,” Will scoffed. “Jesus did not need blood and incantations to raise the dead.”

“You brush aside your power as if it is so inconsequential,” Hannibal murmured. “I have travelled to many places, Will, met countless witches in my time pursuing this career. I have never met one like you.”

Will rolled his eyes. “I’m sure you say that to all the witches you meet.”

“You can do things that no one else can. You are…,” Hannibal trailed off, sighing and shaking his head. “Every witch I have met has been powerful in their own way, of course. Such is the nature of being born with magic. But you are special - surely you must realise that?”

“I’m different,” Will said flatly. “I can’t heal like Raphael can or like Magdalena could. I can’t really scry or See like Alana Bloom. I can’t reverse crop blights or tell you your future. The only animals I have an affinity for are my Familiar and Magdalena’s Familiar. My magic is unconventional, that is all.”

“Will,” Hannibal said softly. “You can speak to and see the Dead. You can travel to the Netherworld. You can bring the Dead back to life. You can conjure and bend shadows to your will, summon wind and fire from thin air, you paralysed a man this evening with a mere flick of your hand. You are *extraordinary* .”

“It’s rigor mortis,” Will said softly. “What I did to Raphael. It’s not permanent or harmful, of course, but it’s part of how Death affects my magic.”

Hannibal’s face swam with utter besotted fascination. “Even more incredible.”

“Unholy,” Will corrected, closing his eyes. “I wanted… I wanted so badly to be a creature of light. I thought I was until I…”

Hannibal frowned, leaning forwards. “Until what?”

Will look ashamed. “I told you about how I tried to kill myself when I was about fifteen. I’ve always thought that… that this is my punishment for that. I’ve tried to pray away my magic, Hannibal. I’ve asked God to reverse it, because up until I tried to kill myself when I was teenager, I had no magic. I just woke up with it, like a stone in the pit of my stomach. I sometimes think that this is my cross to bear, my penance for trying to defy God.”

Hannibal stood suddenly, crossing the space between them and taking Will’s face between his hands. Will flinched at the sudden contact, forced to look up into Hannibal’s eyes. His cheeks burned where Hannibal touched him.

“Don’t,” Hannibal chided him. “Don’t degrade yourself like this. What you have is a *gift* Will, an abundance of magic never seen before. And I care very little for what your God may or may not think of what you have done to yourself in your life; all of it has made you the person you are today, and I cannot express to you how spectacular you are. Your God does not *deserve* you if what you say is true.”

Will said nothing, his lips parting as he stared back at Hannibal. He lost himself gazing into the pools of honey and amber in Hannibal’s sockets, hypnotised by the intensity of which Hannibal looked at him. As if Will was worthy; as if he really meant everything he had said about Will.

“We’re going to catch this killer,” Hannibal said softly, thumb sweeping over Will’s cheekbone. “The trap is perfect; what we practised today is bound to draw him to us. You alone will have succeeded in this, Will - I want you to remember that when all of this is over and we are all supposed to go back to our normal lives.”

Will caught himself - he found the words stewing on his tongue, desperate for release. He wanted to tell Hannibal he didn’t want it to be over. He didn’t want them all to go back to their normal lives. He didn’t want Jack and Jimmy and Bev to go back up north to return to Quantico - Zeller, he couldn’t care less. He didn’t want Hannibal to leave and head off to wherever his research took him next, somewhere on the other side of the globe.

The thought of Hannibal jetting off and meeting a witch who was more ‘ *fascinating* ’ and ‘ *extraordinary* ’ than Will set jealousy and rage flaring to life in his gut. It caused his magic to flicker momentarily, the electricity stuttering around the room and sending the lamps flickering.

Hannibal looked around. “What is it?”

“Nothing,” Will insisted, clawing the snarling beast that was his power back inside.

“Will.”

He drew in a deep breath, looking up at Hannibal, never having felt so vulnerable. “I was thinking about when this is over. About when Jack and the others leave, when you are back travelling around the world writing papers, researching and… and meeting other witches. I will be… I will go back to how things were.”

“And how were they, exactly? Before Jack came? Before we met?”

“Lonely,” Will whispered, feeling as though he’d just torn his heart from his chest and held it up to Hannibal for inspection. “Months of silence. No one but the Dead, whispering to me every waking minute, sleepless nights. Spectres drifting around the halls of this house and I feel as though I’ve become one of them too. Fading into the dust.”

Hannibal’s eyes clouded with something akin to rage, unfiltered anger laced with sorrow.

“There’s moments of life, of colour and feeling,” Will continued, his eyes misting with tears and his throat feeling thick. “Raphael to share my bed with when it suits one of us. A lonely widow who will brave the journey down my driveway and knock on the door to ask if I can speak with her long dead, beloved spouse. It helps seeing the comfort in their faces even as they cry when I communicate with their loved ones, passing their messages along. But those things are so few and far inbetween.”

“Come with me,” Hannibal said suddenly, his voice brittle and ragged. “Come with me when all of this is done. There’s so much we could do together. So much of the world I would be honoured to show you. Places where your magic would be celebrated for the precious thing it is.”

Will shakily encircled his fingers around Hannibal’s wrists where he was still clasping Will’s face between his hands, smiling watery and morose. “I can’t.”

“Why n - ”

“I *can’t* .”

Before Hannibal could speak again, Will pulled the older man towards him, shifting to the side as the professor sat next to him on the loveseat. Hannibal looked confused, frowning and blinking at Will’s sudden forwardness. He didn’t complain, however, when Will shifted to straddle himself across Hannibal’s lap once more - just as he had down downstairs in the middle of the magic circle when they’d been drenched in blood.

“I want you to kiss me,” Will whispered into the miniscule space between their faces. “I don’t want to think about what comes after. I just want you to kiss me.”

Hannibal threaded his fingers through Will’s damp curls, relishing the weight of the witch atop him. “I thought you said we shouldn’t.”

“I did say that.”

“You said we barely know each other.”

“We don’t, do we?”

“You said to me you wanted nothing to do with me on numerous occasions. That you dislike me, do not want me here.”

“Perhaps I was a little harsh.”

“What changed?”

“Hannibal…”

“Will. I just want to understand.”

Will stroked his palms flat down Hannibal’s broad chest, savouring the site of him beneath him as he straddled the older man. “Maybe you’ve grown on me. I’m still not your friend, Hannibal. But I… I appreciate what you’re trying to do.”

“And what exactly am I trying to do?” Hannibal asked, raising a brow.

“You’re not overstepping. You’re willing to help me do things that would send Jack and the others running for the hills. You find me… interesting, for some reason, not terrifying like most other people do.”

“I am not most people.”

“No. I’m starting to sense that now.”

“Will - I need to know this isn’t because of what happened with Raphael.”

Will tipped his forehead forwards until it rested against Hannibal’s. “I want you to kiss me because it felt nice when we kissed before, Hannibal. It’s nothing more complicated than that.”

“I have to tell you that I have… I’ve been thinking about you,” Hannibal confessed. “I can’t seem to stop thinking about you.”

Will’s lips tugged up in one corner, a soft smirk. “You’ve been thinking about me? In what way?”

Hannibal’s breath hitched, pupils dilating as he felt Will’s hips shift against his crotch, picking right up where they’d left off downstairs. “In all ways. Of kissing you. Watching you use your magic, how brilliant you are. Of holding you. Other things I probably should not be thinking about.”

“Just tell me you’ve thought about fucking me,” Will whispered, ducking his head to kiss at Hannibal’s pulse in his throat. “That’s what you’re getting at, isn’t it?”

Hannibal groaned, sliding his hands down to grip Will’s ass as the witch rolled his hips forwards a little. “So uncouth, Will.”

Will kissed him, hard and firm on the mouth, then bit down and tugged at Hannibal’s lower lip as he broke the kiss, holding Hannibal’s gaze. “You want to know what I’ve been

thinking? I've been thinking you've got a dirty mouth underneath all this prim and proper composure you put on for everyone to see. I think, Professor Lecter, that tongue is more than a little wicked."

"Would you like to find out?" Hannibal breathed against his lips, tilting his head to skim his nose along Will's jaw.

"I - "

The screeching of tyres was audible even from upstairs in the library, sequestered away in the quiet and dim glow of lamps and towering book shelves. They froze as a car door slammed, once, twice, three times. Footsteps *sprinting* towards the front door, crunching under the gravel, and then -

"Will! Will, open the door!"

Will shut his eyes, drawing in a deep breath and steeling himself. "Do you think they'll go away if we pretend we're not here?"

"Will?! Professor Lecter?"

"Ah. My car is parked out front," Hannibal commented, sounding immediately downtrodden.

"Twice in one fucking evening," Will cursed, scrambling out of Hannibal's lap and staring in dismay at the obvious erection straining at the front of his trousers. "The universe really doesn't want me to get off."

Hannibal's eyes darkened with lust, even as the pounding at the front door continued. "Later. I'd hate to leave you wanting."

Will blushed, squirming under that look Hannibal was giving him. "There might not be a later, Hannibal. Jack might be dragging us out to another scene."

Hannibal rose from the loveseat, coming to stand before Will and stroking his fingers over the witch's sharp jaw once more. "Later, Will. I promise."

Will went to open his mouth, but the shouting and banging on the front door rose to a racket. He sighed heavily, and threw Hannibal once last lingering glance before turning and heading out of the library, the professor following close behind.

The night was dark outside around the plantation, as it always was, but something about the way the shadows moved around the house that evening set Will's teeth on edge, the hair at the back of his neck prickling. He tried to shake the feeling as he drew closer to the front door, but something was simply just *wrong* .

But he'd closed the circle earlier, when he and Hannibal had been practising the scene they'd set for their killer to convince him to reveal himself. He'd drawn the runes of protection, symbols of containment. The goat's body was disposed of, the head preserved with Will's

magic for when it would be needed later for their trap. Raphael hadn't used any of his own magic when he'd been here earlier, and yet… what was this feeling?

Will's mind forced the image of Magdalena's manic periods of trying to purify the house with mandrake ash and goat blood all those years ago to the forefront of his thoughts as he opened the front door. The fuzzy outline of silhouettes awaited him through the stained and frosted glass in the door, frantically yelling for Will.

He was met with chaos.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you for all your comments guys, I sit there grinning like an idiot when I read them - I love how insightful you all are <3 <3 <3

I still haven't gotten round to replying to people who have commented recently and for that I am so sorry! Also, this chapter most likely has a bunch of typos and mistakes because I'm really busy this weekend and wanted to bash this chapter out before Friday, so please enjoy a slightly ahead of schedule update!

Love ya <3

Thirteen

Chapter Notes

Psalm 119:25
My soul cleaves to the dust;
revive me according to thy word!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Will tried not to heave at the sight of Jimmy's severed finger nestled amongst the ice in the Ziplock bag that had been thrust at him. He'd seen worse, of course, but the fact Jimmy was lolling about in one of his kitchen chairs looking positively green whilst his left index finger sat in the bag of ice Will was gingerly holding was still not the most pleasant experience.

At least Jimmy was alive, and not a living corpse, a breathing cadaver months along into the process of decay and rot. Will had seen the rate at which demonic infestation could corrupt and defile - Jimmy should count himself lucky all he'd lost was a finger that he'd cut off during a hazy sleepwalking trance, and hadn't woken up to find layers of skin peeling off his body and bile dripping past his lips with every word he tried to form.

"You have to do something!" Jack bellowed, gesturing wildly to Jimmy.

"I can preserve his finger," Will began carefully, "save it from necrosis. My magic can do that much. But he needs healing magic, which I unfortunately don't possess an ounce of."

"We had to pick him up from the ER because everything the doctors did wouldn't work," Bev pleaded. "They tried to reattach his finger but whatever dark magic our killer has been using, whatever this demon has done, his body rejects his finger."

Will squinted, looking at her closely. He was sure he could see a small piece of bloody tissue stuck in her hair, crimson crusted underneath her jaw. "Beverly, is that blood in your hair and on your neck?"

Bev flinched. "My shower started spewing blood and gore on me last night. But that's besides the point - Jimmy is the one who cut his own finger off whilst sleepwalking!"

Will shot a glance at Jack. The burly man was covered in gashes on his face and hands, as if talons had raked over his skin. "Et toi, Jack?"

"The owls," Jack gritted out. "Damn near took my eye out."

Will pressed his lips together. "So Jimmy took his finger clean off, huh?"

Jimmy smiled weakly and then crumpled his face in a combination of pain and queasiness as Will carefully lifted Jimmy's wrist aloft, inspecting the bandaged stub that was still steadily seeping blood. Hannibal watched from the doorway, leaning against the door frame of the kitchen with crossed arms, dark eyes sweeping over Jack and his team but always zeroing back in on the witch he had been very much in the middle of kissing before Jack, Bev and Jimmy showed up.

Zeller was nowhere in sight.

"What about Brian?" Hannibal asked softly. "Has he been affected by the demon?"

"He's fine," Bev replied curtly, clearly pissed off. "Called him on the drive over here. Said he's been sleeping like a baby, no sign of demonic infestation with him."

"He wasn't in the basement that day when I conducted the ritual," Will remarked, holding the ice bag and Jimmy's finger above his head and letting the light catch on it, inspecting the severed digit. "Makes sense that he's unaffected."

"What about you two?" Bev asked slowly, glancing between the witch and the professor. "Us three are being targeted, clearly. Have you not experienced anything out of the ordinary?"

"My home and my body are too heavily warded to be possessed or infested," Will replied, sighing a little and placing the ice bag down. "I learnt my lesson the hard way with demon summoning a few years ago how easy it is to be infected."

Bev raised an eyebrow. "So that's what all the tattoos are for? And why this house is a jigsaw of runes and talismans?"

Will shrugged. "Amongst other things."

"Other things? What could be worse than having to ward yourself from a demon?" Bev grimaced, shaking her head.

Will gave her an equally grim look in return. "Nothing for you to worry about."

"What about you, Professor?" Jack asked, narrowing his eyes at Hannibal.

"I've not noticed anything unusual," Hannibal confessed.

They watched as the professor reached under the collar of his shirt, fishing forth a talisman from beneath his button down. It was leather cord with a small black stone attached to it, bearing an inscription in the Old Tongue: 𐤒𐤃𐤔𐤀

Will darted forwards, grabbing the stone from where it rested around Hannibal's neck and hissing at the burning sting of power that emanated from the black stone. He nearly dropped it, his mouth tasting of blood, his heart shuddering in his chest.

" *Qudšā* ," Will breathed, reading the inscription. "Where did you get this?"

“A witch who took a liking to me many years ago in Jericho,” Hannibal replied casually, shrugging. “He assisted me with some research I was conducting into the Dead Sea scrolls and early Gnostic texts. He told me it would protect me no matter what I came across during my life and I must admit, it’s come in rather handy over the years.”

Will bit his tongue, stopping himself from nearly blurting out that this was no ordinary talisman. The thing was *raging* with magic, so much so that Will was amazed he had not felt the artefact vibrating in the air around Hannibal from the first day they had met. Of course, it was undetectable to anyone who was not a witch, but the sheer force of magic that had been poured into the small black stone was enough to blow walls apart - enough to demolish an entire town. Such an item could only be created through extremely dark, old magic - the kind of magic that asked for life in return.

Will knew, because he’d felt that exact same Chaos as he lingered between life and death in the Netherworld, when Magdalena had extinguished every last drop of her magic to save him and take Will’s place during the Ritual of Lazarus.

Who’s life had been taken in order for Hannibal to possess such a powerful talisman?

“Well,” Will said roughly, almost flinching from the dark, possessive look Hannibal gave him as he dropped the stone, “that explains why you and I haven’t been affected.”

“Can we get back to how I’m going to save my fucking finger?” Jimmy slurred from the kitchen chair.

“There’s nothing I can do,” Will told him, shrugging. “Wrong kind of witch, wrong kind of magic, pal. Sorry.”

“That’s not good enough!” Jack insisted. “Call one of the witches from the coven - surely one of them possesses healing magic? The hospital told us only magic could fix this because magic was what had caused it.”

Will bit his tongue, clenching his fists. “You know that’s not possible - exiled witch over here, remember? I can’t just call one of them up and - ”

Hannibal cleared his throat very loudly, sending Will a pointed look.

Fine - maybe he could call Raphael for a no strings attached booty call, but this was *different* .

“Please, Will,” Jimmy whimpered.

Will was weak. Pathetic. So easily swayed. He groaned, dragging a hand over his face and cursing.

“Fine - *fine* . I can call someone. But it stays between us, do you understand? He’s risking more than any of you understand by coming here, and that’s even *if* he agrees to come out here.”

Jimmy's shoulders slumped in relief and he gave Will a watery smile. "Thanks, Will. I knew I could count on you."

Will simply glowered at him.

"And whilst we're here - you're all going to have to pack your bags and stay here for the time being," Will grumbled, wincing at his own announcement.

"What?!" Bev spluttered. "No offence, Will, but moving in to your creepy old - "

"This is just the start," Will snapped, cutting her off. "You think a decapitated finger will satisfy a demonic entity like Belial? He's not going to stop until you've all slit your own throats and drowned in your blood, and that's if you're lucky. You don't even know the start of what demonic infestation can do to an ordinary person. I can't protect you if you're spread out across New Orleans."

"It's that bad?" Jack asked cautiously. "We're really in that much danger?"

"The only thing that's going to help you now is if you're under this roof wearing talismans I've made for you. Demons are hungry, Jack; *starving* . An infestation like this doesn't just mean you'll die - you're going to suffer beyond your imagination, to the point where death will be a kindness. I'd like to think you all value your lives enough to take my advice and move in here, and trust me, I dislike the idea as much as you. But I really don't want it on my conscience that I could have protected you and I failed to do so."

"What about a priest?" Bev suggested wearily. "An exorcism?"

"None of you are Catholic," Will responded dryly. "You're not baptised. Won't help."

Bev crossed her arms, frowning. "What, so all of a sudden I've got to be Catholic or else God's going to let me be tortured and murdered by a demon?"

"I don't make the rules," Will grumbled, waving a hand at her. "Now, go home and get your stuff whilst I call someone to help Jimmy."

"Hello, beautiful," Raphael purred as Will wrenched open the front door.

Will took a deep breath. "Raphael."

"I have to admit, I wasn't expecting you to call me back so soon. I only left a few hours ago."

Will gave him a nervous smile. "Just… come inside, will you?"

A smirk spread across the other witch's mouth, eyes twinkling. "That can be arranged."

Will suppressed the groan at Raphael's awful innuendo, stepping aside to let the taller man into his home again for the second time that day. Will slowly steered him towards the kitchen, swallowing.

“What’s with the other cars out front, by the way?” Raphael asked as he followed him down the hall.

“Uh…well…” Will trailed off, quickly opening the kitchen door and stepping over the threshold, “the thing is…”

Raphael stood still in the doorway as several pairs of eyes all zeroed in on him.

“You - I remember you. You were at the meeting with the coven Council the other day,” Jack grunted in way of greeting, looking Raphael up and down.

Raphael stiffly turned to look at Will, giving him a tense, tight smile. “Will - what is this?”

Will sheepishly gestured to Jimmy, who was looking quite frankly horrendous at this point, pale and ashen from the blood loss. “I need a favour.”

Raphael gave him a flat, dead stare, then swept his eyes to Hannibal who sat opposite Jimmy at the kitchen table. Jack had returned not long ago with a bag of his belongings, Beverly still at her apartment gathering her things and then heading to collect Jimmy’s clothes and necessities, seeing as he could barely stand, never mind drive.

Hannibal met Raphael’s gaze with a measured, steady smile and unwavering eyes.

“You missed out that little detail about needing a favour when you called me,” Raphael said stiffly to the Necromancer, clearly unimpressed. “Why are they here, Will?”

Will drew in another deep breath, coming to stand behind Jimmy and lifting the Ziplock bag of ice and Jimmy’s finger aloft. “Need some of your magic.”

Raphael’s lip curled. “Is that…”

“My finger,” Jimmy mumbled miserably, holding up his bandaged hand. “Cut it off in the early hours of this morning. Apparently that’s something demonic infestation can do.”

Raphael shook his head. “I’m sorry but - what is it exactly you want me to do here?”

“The doctors in the ER couldn’t reattach his finger,” Will provided. “Your magic can.”

Raphael scoffed. “And why would I do that? It’s none of my business if your friend here is running around chopping himself into little pieces.”

Will set the bag down and stepped closer to the taller witch. “Raphael. Please.”

Raphael gave him a long look, their eye contact unbreaking. To the others, it looked as though they were having a silent conversation in their minds, which Jack was pretty sure something witches could secretly do, but just chose not to disclose to the general populace.

A muscle ticked in Raphael’s jaw and he looked at the others briefly. “Excuse us a moment.”

He clamped a hand down on Will's shoulder and steered the Necromancer back out of the kitchen, slamming the door behind him. They left Jimmy, Hannibal and Jack in awkward silence as hissing, angry voices slowly began to drift down the hall and towards the closed kitchen door.

"What are they saying?" Jack asked cautiously, moving to press his ear against the door.

"I believe they're conversing in the Old Tongue," Hannibal supplied, putting his best effort in to sound unfazed by the muffled noises leaking under the draughty kitchen door.

"But what are they saying? You understand that language, don't you?" Jack pressed impatiently.

"I can't quite hear," Hannibal lied, getting up to refill Jimmy's glass of SunnyD, knowing the man needed more sugar.

The voices raised even more in the hallway, Will's pitch increasing as he cursed something at Raphael.

"Doesn't sound pleasant, whatever it is they're saying," Jimmy commented sluggishly, gratefully accepting the glass from Hannibal.

"I find it quite a melodic language," Hannibal merely commented, smiling more to himself than the other two men in the kitchen.

The door burst open again and Jack stumbled back, the two witches reappearing. Will rolled his eyes at Jack's obvious eavesdropping whilst Raphael approached the table with a dramatic sigh. He picked up the bag containing Jimmy's finger and stared Jimmy down.

"This is going to hurt, my friend. Do you still wish to proceed?" Raphael asked gravely.

Jimmy nodded as eagerly as he could, sitting forwards a little. "Yes. Please, just get it over with."

Bev walked back into the creaking old plantation to be greeted by the sound of groans and sobs. She raced to the kitchen where the noises where coming from, frantically pushing the door open, heart in mouth -

Jimmy was slumped over the table whilst the witch Raphael was muttering under his breath and grinding a concoction of herbs in a small bowl, Jimmy's finger looking halfway attached back to his knuckle.

"What the fuck?" Bev breathed, blinking rapidly.

"Beverly," Hannibal smiled warmly, something strange glinting in his eyes as he welcomed her. "Good to have you back. Did you manage to collect all of Jimmy's belongings?"

"I… yeah. What the hell is happening here?" she deadpanned, dropping the duffel bags at her feet.

“Raphael kindly agreed to fix Jimmy’s finger,” Jack answered, watching the process with a grim expression.

Raphael smeared the ground up bundle of birch and blackthorn herbs and roots around the half-knitted back together skin where Jimmy’s finger and knuckle were partially re-joined. Jimmy let out a small gasp of pain, looking away from the ordeal as Raphael carefully grasped the digit and Jimmy’s knuckle between his large hands and continued to murmur methodical chants in the Old Tongue.

There was a collective gasp in the kitchen when soft, glowing light began to seep between Raphael’s hands from where he cupped them around Jimmy’s injury.

“Wow,” Beverly remarked softly, “that’s… that’s beautiful. I’ve never seen magic like this happen up close before.”

In the corner of the kitchen, Hannibal noticed Will stiffen from where he slouched against a cabinet. He knew immediately the off hand comment had hurt the Necromancer - Bev’s remark about Raphael’s seemingly ‘pure’, healing magic had hit a nerve, reinforcing Will’s belief that he was tainted and dark. That his magic was unworthy. Hannibal wanted to go to him, pull him close and -

Will’s brilliant blue eyes cut to his and he met his gaze suddenly. Hannibal smiled softly at him, drinking in the image of Will’s tousled curls and the ink peeking out around the neckline of his shirt. His smile faded when the witch did not return it, Will’s face blank and unmoving. His eyes fell to Hannibal’s chest, as if he was staring straight through the fabric of his clothes and at the leather cord around his neck that bore the talisman.

Jimmy wailed, curling in on himself as much as he could as Raphael’s magic peaked, bright lights flaring around his hands as Jimmy’s finger fused back together. When Raphael lifted his hands away, Jimmy’s own hand looked as though there had been no injury there at all. He lifted his hand before his face, wriggling all his fingers and staring in shock.

“Incredible,” Jimmy marvelled, flexing the now healed finger. “It’s like new.”

Raphael shrugged. “Nothing a little magic can’t fix.”

“Thank you,” Jimmy told him sincerely, leaning forwards. “I owe you. Please tell me what I can do to repay you, I -”

“That won’t be necessary,” Raphael cut him off, smiling tightly as his eyes slid to Will. “Like Will said; it’s a favour.”

“You’re sure?” Jimmy asked in disbelief. “You just reattached a severed finger, Raphael. That’s no small feat.”

The smile on the other witch’s face faded, his eyes never leaving Will’s. “Oh, I’m sure. It’s Will you should be thanking, anyway.”

Without another word or explaining what he meant, Raphael stood gracefully from the table and tucked his chair back in, crossing the room to the door.

“Will? A word,” Raphael muttered, lingering momentarily whilst Will shrugged away from the cabinet he’d been leaning against.

“Sure,” Will sighed, before pausing and glancing around the kitchen. “There’s two bedrooms down stairs, at the end of the hall, turn left and then head right down to the end of the corridor. Fight it out who’s sleeping on the couch or whether Jack and Jimmy want to share. No one is allowed upstairs, under any circumstance. Oh, and stay away from the snake - she doesn’t like strangers and she’s venomous. I’ll be back later.”

With that, Will followed the other witch from the kitchen without another word. The sound of the front door closing was deafening, leaving the four of them sitting in stunned silence.

“What… I’m sorry, but *what* was that about?” Jimmy asked incredulously. “Where are they going? Why the fuck does he have a snake?”

“Your guess is as good as mine,” Beverly grumbled, shaking her head. “I’m going to go get unpacked. If no one hears from me in an hour or so, I’ve either been attacked by whatever snake is lurking around here or a ghost is terrorising me.”

“That’s the spirit,” Jack replied grimly. “I’m going to see if our witch has any good bourbon stashed in this kitchen.”

“I think I may join you in that endeavour,” Jimmy sighed, rubbing at his eyes tiredly.

“Professor? You sticking around?” Jack asked.

Hannibal tilted his head, smiling in that strange, unreadable way of his. “I think I should get back to my hotel. It’s getting late. Tell Will I’m sorry I didn’t get to say goodbye before I left, won’t you?”

Jack simply gave him a firm nod before setting about raiding Will’s kitchen cabinets.

Heated, fevered lips crashed against Will’s the minute his back hit the tree trunk.

Even at this late hour, the air was muggy and humid around them. Cicadas and fireflies assaulted Will’s hearing and his sight, the feel of the Cypress tree bark Raphael had him pressed against digging into his back.

“You realise how much you have me wrapped around your finger?” Raphael whispered against his mouth, insistent and firm.

Will simply unbuckled Raphael’s belt and tore at the buttons of his jeans. “Least it’s not a severed finger.”

“I’d be in so much shit if the Coven found out about this,” Raphael groaned as Will sank his hand beneath the band of the other witch’s underwear.

Will gripped his member tightly, tugging and smiling at the moan that escaped the taller man's lips. "Let's not get things confused, Raphael. You only helped back there because you want to fuck so badly - little desperate, even for you, isn't it?"

Raphael's hand curled around Will's throat, pinning him to the tree.

They'd slunk away into the shadowed night away from Will's house, down the sloped garden towards the thick clusters of cypress trees that lined the banks of the Mississippi that cut through the property of the old plantation. The house looked doll-sized in the distance, the soft glow spilling from the ground floor windows the only source of light under the heavily clouded night.

"Mm, what? You don't like hearing the truth?" Will grinned underneath the pressure of Raphael's hand around his neck.

"You need me to fuck that attitude out of you?" Raphael snarled softly before kissing Will viciously, hungry for the other witch's submission.

"I got what I needed from you when you helped my friend," Will spat back bitterly. "I'm just following through on what I promised you."

"And do your so called friends back in your house know I only agreed to help if I got to fuck you? To pick up where we left off earlier today before that arrogant prick of a professor interrupted?"

Will ground his hips forwards against Raphael's, biting his lip at the feel of their straining erections pressed together. He'd never admit it to the other witch, but Will secretly preferred it when Raphael was cold and spiteful to him before they fucked. It made Will's heart race, made him shudder with excitement, and right now it was making Will forget all about how he'd straddled said professor in the library earlier on. How he'd wanted nothing more than for Hannibal to grip his hips so tight he'd bruise as he guided Will down onto his -

"Says just as much about you as it does about me," Will retorted against Raphael's lips. "How would it look for the benevolent nursemaid witch if they found out you didn't help Jimmy out of the goodness of your heart? That you only did it because you - "

Will's sentence died in his throat as the taller witch grasped him and spun him round to face the tree trunk, pinning him against the bark with all his body weight.

"Get your pants down," Raphael whispered cruelly against his ear, sending shivers down Will's spine. "You still loose from earlier?"

Will wasn't sure if he really was, but didn't care either way. He just wanted Raphael to take him against this damn tree in the shadows by the river, hidden away from the people in his home he had begrudgingly come to care very much about.

"Come on," Will breathed raggedly, his heart thumping in his chest. "Raphael, just - "

Humid air hit Will's ass as his clothes were tugged down and away, one of Raphael's warm, broad hands grasping one his cheeks and spreading him apart. Will groaned against the tree bark as Raphael's cock nudged his hole, slowly pushing past his rim.

"Fuck, you're *tight* ," Raphael hissed in pleasure, sinking inside gradually.

Will merely pushed his hips back in response, taking more of Raphael in, inch by inch, until he was seated fully inside of the Necromancer. Raphael held him still against the tree for a moment and breathed heavily against the back of Will's neck. Will arched his back, lengthening his spine and dipped his shoulders as he gripped the tree in front of him. Raphael took the invitation to start fucking him properly then, fingers holding Will's hips in a vice-like hold and thrusting with precise, hungry strokes.

Will bit down on his lip to muffle the sounds, his own erection forgotten and left to deflate between his legs as his mind forced the image of Hannibal's face back into focus, of the expression the professor had worn earlier on today when he'd opened Will's bedroom door to find the debacle that had been occurring between Raphael and himself. Guilt swept through his veins as he remembered the reverence with which Hannibal had kissed him, coated in blood and kneeling in the magic circle Will had cast.

He tried to shove the thoughts aside, tried to lose himself in the soft groans Raphael let loose, in the way the taller witch's hips smacked against his ass as he fucked him, but all Will could think about once more was Hannibal - this time in the library, his handsome face looking so striking as Will had straddled him again and hungrily kissed him. Of how Hannibal had asked Will to leave New Orleans with him when all of this was over, to travel the world with him.

Contrition was no stranger to Will, not with the guilt his Catholicism bore down on him so often, but it seared along Will's synapses as Raphael fucked him. Remorse corded around his heart, the thick and muggy night air of New Orleans feeling too clotted to breathe in properly, and Will found himself horrified as tears misted over his eyes. He blinked them away furiously, trying to steel himself and think of the fact that Jimmy was better now, that he wouldn't be doing this with Raphael otherwise.

He would have rather have had Hannibal lure him out into the dark to fuck against this tree, to take him apart piece by piece and whisper filth in his ear.

"Will - *fuck* , oh fuck, *mi cielo* ," Raphael gasped out loudly, shuddering behind Will as he came.

He tried to pull Will towards him further, to kiss him and reach for his cock, but Will merely pushed him away. His erection had vanished a good few minutes ago anyway, and even if he had wanted to come, he didn't want to be hidden down here a minute longer in the shadows with Raphael.

"What is it?" Raphael panted, re-securing his jeans and belt.

Will wrenched his own trousers back up, spinning to face Raphael. "What is it? Are you… are you joking?"

The moonless night cast thick shadows over the handsome witch's face, the glow from the lights on in the plantation further up the garden barely providing enough light for Will to see the crease between Raphael's thick, sculpted brows as he frowned at him.

"Will," Raphael said softly, reaching to cup Will's face gently.

Will smacked his hand away before he could get near. "Don't. Don't pretend like you give a shit about me."

"Pretend? I have never pretended to give a shit about you! You don't realise how much I actually care!"

"Fucking me is easy. It's convenient. Let's not pretend we're anything more than that, not now after all these years of meeting in secret and having to hide the fact we've been sleeping together. You made it *very* fucking clear, from day one, that you have no desire for us to be together," Will hissed, backing away from the other witch.

"I cannot help the circumstances we are in, mi cielo," Raphael insisted, pleading. "Do you not think if things were different, I would proudly let the whole world know you are mine? That I lo - "

Raphael's words died with a startled choke that released from his throat as Will's magic burst forwards, thrashing the other witch with tendrils of shadow like limbs as it erupted from the air around Will. Raphael careened across the mossy bank, hitting the tree behind him with a heavy thud.

"You ever try to say those three words to me ever again," Will snarled in the darkness, "and I'll tear you to pieces - I mean it. Don't insult me like that, Raphael."

Raphael gasped, deep gulping breaths, as he stared at Will in disbelief, clutching his chest where the Necromancer's magic had hit him square. "You are impossible, Will. You always have been. But I'm not lying to you, I swear that I meant every word I said, including the words you won't let me say. I'm not stupid enough to press you, however."

Raphael staggered upright to his feet, wincing as he rubbed at his chest once more. Will glowered at him, folding his arms across his chest and jerking his chin towards the direction of the driveway at the front of the house behind them.

"I think it's best you leave," Will muttered. "We're done here."

"Done?" Raphael repeated, frozen.

"I don't want to see you again," Will replied curtly, standing his ground. "I'd say this is a break up, but how can I break up with you when all we ever had was casual sex for the last twelve years?"

Raphael shook his head, in shock. "You're just angry. You don't mean it."

"I'm done being *used* ," Will spat. "I'm done fucking you and hiding away like the dirty secret I have had no choice but to be. I deserve more than this - I *want* more than this."

“Mi cielo,” Raphael implored him, eyes wide and panicked. “You need some space and time to cool down, which I will give you. But this is not the end of us, of - ”

“There has never been an ‘us’, Raphael,” Will spat, his magic surging again. “Tonight only clarified what I’ve been feeling from the first time you told me we could only ever be secret. I’m through with living off the scraps we’ve fed each other for over a decade. You want to love someone? Great - go ahead and knock yourself out. But whatever this is between us, it is *not* love. You don’t blackmail the people you love into fucking you.”

Raphael visibly flinched. “I didn’t blackmail you.”

“But you did! And I have used you just as much as you have used me!” Will snapped, an irritated breeze starting to rustle through the towering Cypress trees they stood under. “I didn’t invite you back here because I wanted to have sex with you! I called you back over and made it seem like that because I knew otherwise you wouldn’t come! And then you only agreed to help my friend if I let you fuck me - don’t you see how goddamn awful and toxic all of that sounds?”

“It’s just a small bump in the road,” Raphael insisted. “We’ll move on from it, forgive each other. This thing between us is too strong, too old and precious, to just walk away from it.”

“There’s nothing to walk away from,” Will told him coldly, shaking his head. “Now leave, Raphael. I don’t want you here, not now or ever again. We are *done* .”

The taller witch went to speak, but then clamped his mouth shut and nodded once, firmly. Will expected him to say something further, to argue his case, but he simply turned and began marching back up the sloping lawn of the garden towards his car. Will stood in the shadows on the bank of the Mississippi, trying to regain his composure and quash the swelling anger inside of him.

His magic fizzled within, begging to be released, begging to destroy and consume and tear down everything in its path. And he nearly let it, except -

There it was again. That feeling at the back of his neck, closing in around him, as if someone was stood right behind him.

And then he recognised where he’d felt it before.

In the Netherworld, after Francesca had vanished from sight and he’d been left alone in utter pitch blackness. That voice, that hissing curling tongue that rose like a crescendo around him, the feeling of the pressure of *nothingness* weighing down on him.

“ *How enchanting. All that power simmering in your blood. I wonder how it tastes.”*

Will turned, slowly, his heart hammering in his chest. Before him there was nothing but the whisper of branches brushing together, the thick, hulking shadows of tree trunks. Gleaming little beads in the water of the river where the gators rested just above the water line, cicadas and fire flies thrumming in the night air.

And yet it was still there. Pressing against his skin. Like someone was inches away, their breath held and ready to be released with a longing sigh against the nape of his neck.

“ *It is only a matter of time, my love. I’m coming for you.* ”

Will’s hands curled into fists at his sides, his magic rearing its head once more from the pit it lived in deep within him.

“ *Show yourself* ,” Will called out softly in the Old Tongue. “ *I know you’re there.* ”

There was, of course, no response.

“ *You don’t scare me, ancient one* ,” Will whispered into the dark, turning slowly in a circle. “ *Why won’t you show yourself?* ”

One by one, the glowing specks of the fireflies began to die out. The gleam of the reflective structure in the back of the eyes of the gators disappeared, water rippling along the river’s edge. The trees fell deathly silent, the cicadas and other bugs seeming to vanish into thin air.

“More ,” Will hissed in the Old Tongue. “ *I want to see you* .”

Nothing could have prepared Will for the way his magic felt like it was wrenched from his gut, as if he’d been disembowelled. He keeled over, falling to his knees as he felt the air knocked from his lungs, his power tugged and ripped from him as if he were being flayed alive.

“ *In time, my love* .”

The whisper was barely there, but it made Will’s head spin, his vision blur, his ears near bleeding. The darkness of the night had become so unnatural in those few seconds the voice had whispered to him, a pitch-blackness not so dissimilar to the Netherworld. Will could barely see the plantation when he turned his head to look.

“ *Tell me what you want* ,” Will managed to get out past gritted teeth, clutching his gut as if he’d been winded. “ *Where is the man I’m looking for, the one who summoned you* ?”

The laugh that floated on the air around him made Will’s skin crawl, every hair on his body standing up as the night became sweltering, humid beyond anything he’d ever felt as sweat trickled down his back.

“ *I want to drown in the power rippling in your blood, to gnaw the magic from the marrow of your bones and keep you within me til the end of days,”* the voice crooned, feather light and yet somehow crushing and bruising at the same time. “ *I want you, little witch* .”

“ *Where is he* ?” Will pressed, digging his fingers into the soil beneath him as he shuddered, clamping down on the writhing magic underneath his skin. “ *Tell me where he is and you can have me* .”

“ *You’d relinquish yourself so readily? Give your life for such a meaningless endeavour?”*

“It’s not meaningless if the one who summoned you is brought to justice for all the lives he took,” Will bit back, eyes scanning rapidly around him to no avail.

Belial was not going to show himself tonight.

“ *You and I know that five lives mean nothing,”* the voice taunted, flitting around his ears. “ *What is the loss of five humans? They would have died anyway. Their blood was the means to an end for my servant to summon me* .”

“ *My offer - will you accept it, or not?”*

“So demanding, little witch. What if I say no?”

Will slowly clambered back to his feet, sweating and panting with the effort, letting his power bolster him upright and keep him rooted to the floor underneath the nauseating, invisible presence around him. The multiple runes and symbols of protection tattooed into his skin were tingling.

“ *You won’t say no,”* Will replied boldly, the words of the Old Tongue sounding so harsh in the darkness around him. *“I think you want my magic too badly to say no* .”

There was a heavy pause, like the tension before the next rumble of thunder, before a tsunami reached the shore.

“You play a dangerous game, Necromancer .”

“I play no games,” Will spat at the demon, wishing, praying it would show itself to him, materialise. *“The fact you’re here, that you’ve spoken to me for so long, tells me everything I need to know.”*

“Is there comfort in knowing the magic in your blood is so potent? So potent that it draws an entity as old and as powerful as I to you? I have not tasted such magic before, little witch. I can smell you through every layer of this realm, through every veil separating us.”

“You bore me,” Will snapped back in the Old Tongue, lip curling in distaste. *“Accept my offer, ancient one. I won’t make it again, and the way you dance around my question makes me wish to retract it. Now tell me - will you reveal where your servant is?”*

And then, when he’d least been expecting it, the presence faded. The fireflies and cicadas came back to life, the whispering of the Cypress trees returned as their branches swayed against one another in the gentle evening breeze. The gators resurfaced from the inky depth of the Mississippi that cut through Will’s property.

“Shit,” Will cursed, spinning around frantically, knowing the demon’s presence was well and truly gone.

His knees felt like jelly, his heart pounding as his chest constricted with the rush of adrenaline. He bent forwards slightly, bracing his hands on his knees and tried to get control of himself again. He was frazzled around the edges, his magic whipping back and forth

within, his mind racing. As he took a deep, shuddering breath, Will looked back up at the plantation.

He baulked.

There, on the first floor upstairs, a single light had been turned on. And in the window, he saw as clear as day the silhouette of the witch who'd died for him. He saw Magdalena.

Will fought the sob building in his throat, scrunching his eyes shut. He'd not seen her so clearly in so long.

When he opened his eyes again, the house was as it should be; no lights on upstairs, no silhouettes in windows.

"What the fuck is happening to me?" Will whispered to himself, running a soil stained hand through his humid-damp, frizzly curls.

The itch to be back inside, to see all was well with his friends, and to slink inside his bedroom and sink to his knees with his rosary was the only thing that made Will move then. He felt rooted to the spot, physically, despite how much his mind screamed at him to move, to be back inside the plantation with its seal and wards and barriers. With Eesha draped over his shoulders, with Miguel purring at the foot of his bed.

He wanted to forget everything he'd said to Hannibal. He wanted to forget the taste, the feel of his lips. He wanted to erase the existence of what Raphael had done with him, how he'd let the other witch fuck against the tree. He wanted to pretend he hadn't just offered himself up on a silver platter to a demon so they could catch their killer.

And so Will put one foot in front of the other, and made his way back to the house.

Chapter End Notes

Sorry it's been so long guys! Life has been hectic. I hope this longer chapter makes up for it.

Fourteen

Chapter Notes

Matthew 7:6
Do not give dogs what is holy; and do not throw your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under foot and turn to attack you.

Pausing momentarily, Hannibal let himself have the time to study the hunched over figure he'd been looking for. He'd found Will in the small office along the corridor from the lab, hidden underground in the FBI's New Orleans headquarters. Jack had met him upstairs, looking tired and bothered by the scratch marks left by the talons of the owls that had attacked him the night before last. Upon informing Hannibal where the witch was located, Hannibal had descended into the belly of the building in search of Will.

The younger man looked equally, if not more, tired than Jack. Heavy purple rings lay beneath his bloodshot eyes, his hair unkempt, his stubble in desperate need of trimming. Hannibal watched as Will absentmindedly chewed at a hangnail on his thumb, resting his head in his hand as his eyes bore into the page of the book he was reading.

Files and papers and crime scene photos were littered around him.

Hannibal knocked softly, knowing Will was in a daze, not wanting to startle him. Will's head snapped up as Hannibal lingered by the already open door, his eyes wide and alarmed at first, but then a shutter came down on his expression that made Hannibal's stomach twist violently.

"Good morning, Will," he greeted him softly, approaching the table. "I brought you coffee."

He held the take-out cup out to the witch, hungrily watching him and savouring the way Will's breath caught in his throat as their hands brushed, despite the blank look Will gave him.

"Jack informed me you've been here all morning," Hannibal began, settling into his seat opposite the witch. "Is everything alright?"

Will shrugged, sipping the coffee and turning his eyes back to the Grimoire in front of him. "Couldn't sleep last night. Needed to get out of the house."

"I suppose it is unsettling to have so many people in your home when you've been used to living by yourself for so long," Hannibal replied politely, grimacing internally at the way he was having to drag the conversation out of the other man.

"I guess."

“Will?”

“Uh-huh?”

“What’s wrong? Have I done something to offend you?”

Will look up at him again stiffly. “I don’t know. Have you?”

Hannibal paused for a moment, surveying the page Will was reading. The name *Belial* screamed at him in ancient, cursive ink. “Not that I am aware of. Are we to go back to the constant hostility after everything that happened yesterday?”

“Are you going to throw the fact I kissed you back in my face?” Will quipped, his voice dark and contentious.

“What on earth would I do that for?”

Will sucked in a deep breath. “This is messy. I was wrong to involve you in my personal life - I’m sorry about that.”

“What happened, Will? Everything we said to each other yesterday at your house - ”

“I fucked Raphael,” Will blurted out. “After he helped Jimmy. I lied to him about why I’d asked him to come back to my home, and he said he’d only heal Jimmy if I had sex with him. So I did - and you were gone when I got back into the house.”

Hannibal blinked, slowly; it reminded Will startlingly of the way the gators in the river at the bottom of his garden would slip their lids closed before submerging into the water.

“And now you think you should cut all ties with me?” Hannibal asked, his voice and face unreadable.

“Why would you want to have anything to do with me after what I did yesterday? Before Jack and the others showed up, we were going to… it was poor form from me, to do that to you. To let you think we were going to be intimate and then go and fuck someone else whilst you were sat in my damn house.”

Hannibal’s stillness was beginning to unnerve Will, making him squirm in his seat. He sipped his coffee for something to do, a reason to look away from the professor.

“He blackmailed you.”

“I ended things with him.”

“Did you really?”

Will flinched. “What? You don’t take my word for it?”

“Then what is the issue? You’re being honest with me about what transpired between you and him last night, and you have cut your ties to him. I see no reason why we can’t explore this

avenue between us."

"Hannibal - have you listened to anything I just said? I had sex with another man last night, hidden away in the trees, whilst you were none the wiser. Why aren't you disgusted with me?"

"Will," Hannibal said gently, a soft smile breaking out across his mouth. "I am not threatened by Raphael."

Will swallowed, leaning back in his chair and shaking his head in disbelief at the professor. "You do realise how sociopathic that sounded?"

"We all have our faults," Hannibal smoothly replied. "I can be patient, Will. I don't wish to rush you, however I do remember telling you last night that there would be a ' *later* '."

Will blushed at the memory, turning his eyes back to the Grimoire. "I'm afraid last night was… I wasn't thinking properly. I'm sorry for leading you on, Hannibal, I really am. But we can't go there; I want to find our killer, I want to send Belial back to where he came from, and I can't do that if things are… entangled between us."

Hannibal stood slowly, coming round the table to stand behind Will and watching the witch stiffen in his seat. He placed both hands on either side of the open book before Will, leaning forwards to crowd Will against the table. The witch's breath became rapid, his shoulders tensed as Hannibal lent forwards a little to skim his eyes over the book.

"This is no ordinary Grimoire," he murmured against Will's ear, his breath tickling his curls. "Where did you get this?"

"You'd be surprised what people are willing to trade in order to speak to their dead loved ones," Will answered, breathless as his cheeks heated and turned a delicious shade of pink at Hannibal's proximity.

"Someone gave you a five-hundred year old manuscript of the *Keys of Solomon* in the original Latin to be able to speak to a dead relative?" Hannibal asked, his voice dripping like honey down Will's ear.

"Wife," Will answered. "It was his wife he wanted me to summon."

"My, my," Hannibal murmured. "Quite the artefact you have in your possession, Will. Does the University of Oxford know it's missing such a treasured historical item?"

"No one's come knocking at my door yet asking for it back," Will answered, swallowing thickly, cursing the professor's keen eye and the fact he knew immediately just how important the book was that he had before him.

Will nearly yelped at the sensation of lips brushing over the shell of his ear, suppressing a needy moan as Hannibal's teeth grazed his lobe before gently biting down. The older man had him panting and his cock hard from the smallest touch.

“Would you be so opposed to us becoming ‘entangled’, as you put it, after we find our killer? If you’re so worried that you’ll be side-tracked during our hunt for him, what about after?”

Will opened his mouth to speak, but his words failed him as Hannibal moved his mouth to kiss gently at the soft spot behind Will’s ear and jaw.

“I don’t… I…” Will mumbled, eyes slipping shut as warm, large hands slipped from the table to rest on his thighs, pinning him to the chair he sat on.

“I’m sorry - I’m being unfair, aren’t I?” Hannibal murmured, lips brushing over Will’s hammering pulse.

“Just a little,” Will whispered.

Those hands slid further up his thighs, Hannibal’s upper torso still leaning into him from behind. Will bit his lip as fingers trailed a featherlight circle over the very visible bulge at the front of his jeans.

“Shall I stop?”

“Probably,” Will rasped, watching wide eyed as Hannibal teasingly began to pull the zipper of his fly down.

“I need a yes or a no, Will,” Hannibal insisted, relishing the way Will was squirming beneath him.

He cupped Will’s erection through the cotton of his underwear, biting down on the witch’s earlobe once more and savouring the moan that the other man released, shuddering underneath Hannibal’s touch.

“I don’t want you to stop,” Will gasped raggedly, hips rolling up to meet Hannibal’s hand, “but we can’t do this here.”

Hannibal was back on the other side of the table in an instant, picking his coffee back up and looking at Will over the lid as he sipped, the intensity in his honey coloured eyes making Will flush. He sat there, panting, his hands clutching the edges of the table so tightly his knuckles had turned white and his fly unzipped. He was so hard - *God* , he was so hard. He wanted to launch himself at Hannibal.

“So,” Hannibal began, as if nothing had happened, “anything useful in your illegally procured Grimoire about Belial you’d like to share?”

Will finished drawing the last rune on the whiteboard, wincing at the deafeningly loud squeak of the pen as he finished his display.

Jack, Jimmy, Zeller, Bev and Hannibal all sat before him, looking at the magic circle he’d drawn, the picture of the decapitated goat head he’d stuck to the board, and the carefully drawn shapes of the ancient Aramaic of the Old Tongue.

“I’ve seen you do some weird stuff before… but this is the icing on the cake, Will. This feels positively Satanic,” Jack commented gruffly, arms crossed over his chest.

Will pointed to the picture of the goat with the pen. “Well, we are trying to convince our killer that we’re on the same side as him. We need it to be convincing, that we’ve managed to summon the Devil himself.”

“If it took a human life for our killer to summon a demon,” Jimmy countered, “is he really going to believe we summoned Satan with just a goat?”

Will rocked on his heels, hands clasped behind his back. “I’ve been looking back over all the circles and runes he’s used so far. His knowledge of magic is extensive, but it’s not as vast as I first suspected. He was using so many different variations and combinations of circles and runes because he doesn’t know everything. I can convince him that I was able to evoke the Morning Star because of the circle I created.”

“And the uh, what is it again? Arabic? Hebrew?” Zeller asked, waving his hand at the board. “What does it say?”

“Aramaic,” Will corrected him, a little snappy. “It’s the Old Tongue, the language spoken at the time of Christ, and probably the dialect Christ himself spoke in. It’s a message I’m leaving for our killer.”

“Which says…?” Jack asked, trailing off with a raised brow.

Will cleared his throat and looked back at the board. “The direct translation is a little off, but it’s basically an invitation. A call to arms.”

Jack pinched the bridge of his nose and closed his eyes, releasing a long breath. “Just so we’re on the same page - you’re going to stage a magic circle with a decapitated goat head in a public place and leave a message for our killer asking him to join you in worshipping the Devil - that you’ve summoned the Devil and you wish to do his bidding with our killer in tow?”

Will scratched the back of his neck, pulling a face. “Essentially, yes.”

“Management won’t allow this,” Jack gritted out, shaking his head.

Will rolled his eyes. “Since when do you care about what management says? They’ve said no to virtually everything I’ve suggested so far, you let me do it anyway, and it’s gotten you results, hasn’t it?”

“Will,” Jack said slowly, “we’re already on thin ice after Lounds got shots of Francesca’s corpse walking straight out of the murder scene. If word got out that the FBI was allowing you to do this, that you’re essentially honey trapping our killer with all this supposedly fake Satanic shit, what do you think would happen? I’ve already put my neck on the line for you one too many times.”

“But it’s not real,” Will countered, frowning. “The circle doesn’t actually summon anything. It’s a dud.”

“And you think our killer isn’t clued up enough to realise that?” Bev asked, eyes glued to the diagrams and circles on the whiteboard.

“I’m sure of it,” Will insisted. “Jack, this circle, the goat’s head… I know how it looks, but you know by now I’m good at this, that I know what I’m doing. It’s *safe* , I promise you.”

“I don’t doubt your capabilities,” Jack replied. “I’ve seen you defy the laws of nature, Graham. But this won’t fly with higher up, no matter how sterling of a plan it is - it’ll rock the public too much. Or have you forgotten you’re in a country of over two-hundred million Christians?”

Will clenched his jaw. “And what if I do it anyway? What if I stage all of this, tip off Lounds, let it get out to the public and our killer takes the bait - what then?”

Jack’s eyes had already begun to look defeated. “Will…”

“Tell them you had no idea I was going through with this,” Will insisted. “Tell them I went behind your back.”

“And have them think I can’t control you, or this situation? That’s a sure fire way of us all losing our jobs,” Jack muttered. “And I can’t protect you if they come down hard on you and you face legal consequences.”

“Will it matter, when you slap a pair of handcuffs on the bastard and arrest him?” Will retorted. “He won’t be able to resist. He’ll answer the summoning.”

“Run it by me again - he sees the scene, sees the message you’ve left for him, then what? How are we supposed to actually apprehend him?” Zeller pressed, frowning.

Will tapped the board again, this time directing attention to the scrawled numbers underneath the Old Tongue. “These are map coordinates. They lead to an abandoned plantation six miles down the river from my home - that’s where we’ll wait for him. I need to scope it out a little more, but there’ll be plenty of cover for a squad and officers to hide and wait before we can make the arrest.”

“What if he doesn’t work out that you’ve given him a location?” Jimmy pointed out.

If their killer didn’t show, Will was prepared to summon Belial himself and offer himself up in exchange. They’d worked too hard, seen too many corpses, for their killer to remain lurking in the shadows. Will knew his life was forfeit, and he cared very little for the fact. He’d walk willingly into Belial’s clutches after all the darkness and pain he’d inflicted during his time on this mortal plane.

He said none of this to the others, of course. They could never know he was willing to sacrifice himself in order to capture this killer.

“He’ll know what it is,” Will insisted. “I promise.”

As Will turned to begin erasing his writings from the board, he felt the dagger-like sensation of Hannibal's eyes boring into his back, and for a moment Will's stomach dropped at the thought that Hannibal knew what Will was up to. But how could he?

Will dismissed the worry, and went back to his work.

The plantation was cloaked in dark, silence enveloping the building for the most part. The wind made the old wood frame of the house creak slightly in the breeze, but Will had always felt it was akin to the house breathing, the expansion and deflation of a diaphragm.

Upon Jack's insistence, Zeller was now staying with them too, much to the man's delight. Zeller had sneered at Will as he'd dropped his bags next to the couch and reluctantly accepted the blankets Will had begrudgingly held out to him. Jimmy had been bunking down on an old, oversized sofa opposite Zeller, already ready for bed by nine that night and giving Zeller pointed looks as he turned off the lamp beside him.

Will left them to it, retreating upstairs after Beverly and Jack had disappeared to the ground floor bedrooms.

When they'd gotten back from the lab, Will had shut himself away in the library upstairs and crafted them each talismans. He had constructed pendants of euphorbia milii thorns wrapped in dove feathers and soaked in a mixture of crushed dogwood berries and Holy Water, chanting and muttering spells of protection under his breath as he scratched tiny seals and runes into the thorns before attaching them to long leather cords.

Hannibal had not joined them, for which Will was glad. He needed a clear head and having the other man anywhere near him at the moment seemed to distract Will, steering his mind off course. Will was always sharp, focused. Recently, Hannibal took over everything else in his mind, encasing his thoughts in tilted lips and amber eyes and sinful suggestions that made Will's toes curl. Will was simply glad that the professor conveniently had a talisman of his own that was strong enough to keep him protected without Will, even if he was still suspicious about the item.

The team had accepted the talismans he'd made for them gratefully, apart from Zeller, who had looked disgusted with the artefact he was presented with.

"You want me to wear that?" he deadpanned.

"That's the idea, Z," Jimmy scolded him, slinging his own talisman around his neck.

"It looks… *cursed* ," Zeller spat, eyeing the witchcraft suspiciously.

Will had given him a tight lipped smile. "I can make you something cursed, if you like. A voodoo doll, even? All I need is a few strands of your hair, or even better, a few drops of your blood. You'd be *amazed* with what I can do with blood."

Zeller shot him a warning look but then had reluctantly placed the talisman around his neck.

Now settled in bed, Will's mind had drifted to Hannibal, as it had been doing all day.

Something had shifted between them, monumentally. It made Will uneasy, made his stomach flutter, but there was a pull he felt towards the professor he couldn't explain.

Hannibal had been sliding closer, day by day, Will realised. He'd been there at every twist and turn, observing, watching, soft words and fleeting glances that had been escalating to whatever the hell was happening between them now. Will recounted how he'd sought Will out from day one, how he'd played sentry watching over Will during his Transcension ritual. How he'd brought Will home afterwards, cared for him and waited for him to regain his strength. Hannibal had secured their meeting with the Coven, had defended Will during the ordeal and risked cutting ties with Agnes because of it.

He'd sat and listened to Will about his childhood, his exile from the Coven, Magdalena's death. He hadn't batted an eyelid when Will confessed to spending years in a half-crazed blur after Magdalena had died trying to end his own life again through increasingly extreme repetitions of the Ritual of Lazarus. He'd marvelled and awed and breathed in wonder, instead.

Will dreamt of Hannibal, fantasised about him in the small hours. He'd taken root in Will's psyche, and had become such a pivotal part of Will's life in such a small amount of time.

Hannibal had kissed him like he was bathed in the light of a million stars, worshipped and revered his skin with the brush of lips and the trace of calloused palms and fingertips. He had adamantly denounced Will's God at the mere mention of how Will carried the weight of his sins, his feelings of unworthiness, and bolstered his beliefs that Will was magnificent and stunning and special. That Will and his magic were truly astounding.

And then his willingness to kneel soaked in blood by Will's side, watching him summon shadows and butcher the goat's corpse - it hardly made for appealing material, and yet it seemed to have only cemented Hannibal's adoration of him.

Will's blood ran cold with the realisation that Hannibal's fixation with him ran deeper than the superficial fling Will had shared with Raphael for the last twelve years; Hannibal wanted to consume him and be consumed in return, dissolving each other like the rounded wafers of Eucharistic bread on each other's tongues.

And the most terrifying part? Despite how his magic screamed at him that there was something *off* about Hannibal, that he knew the other man had deeply buried secrets, and that he was becoming increasingly suspicious of him, Will wanted it - all of it.

Fifteen

Chapter Notes

> **Hosea 2:19-20**
> *And I will betroth you to me forever; I will betroth you to me in righteousness and in justice, in steadfast love, and in mercy. I will betroth you to me in faithfulness; and you shall know the Lord.*

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Somewhere a shrill, piercing ringing broke the darkness around him. Will blinked awake blearily, his limbs stiff with sleep and his head fuzzy. The noise seemed to grow louder, and rolling on to his front he saw the screen of his cell lit up in the darkness of his bedroom. He reached out clumsily, swatting the bedside table and grasping it.

He didn't look at the caller ID before swiping to answer the call.

"Hello?" he croaked, his voice hoarse from disuse.

"Will," the sigh of relief came, like a soft whisper on the wind.

"Lana?" Will mumbled, rubbing the sleep from his eyes and sitting up a little bit. "What - it's the middle of the night."

"I'm sorry," she sounded breathless, rushed. "I had to call you."

"What's wrong?" Will grunted, swinging his legs over the side of the bed and bracing his head in his free hand. "No one calls in the middle of the night unless something bad has happened."

"It's not what *has* happened," she whispered, a soft rustling following her words. "It's what's *going* to happen."

"Fuck sake," Will cursed softly. "Leave me out of your Scrying."

"I don't intentionally look for you, you know," she retorted sharply, her usually soft voice turning cold. "I don't always have control over what I See."

Will drew in a deep breath, reaching to turn the lamp on by his bed. "What was it?"

She paused for a moment. "I couldn't… it wasn't clear. But you were in danger."

Will gritted his teeth, tilting his head back and staring at the ceiling, drawing on the virtually non-existent well of his patience. Will admired and appreciated Alana Bloom; he truly did.

But he'd be lying if he said that her Scrying abilities didn't sometimes make him wish magic was non-existent.

Her visions came to her uninvited sometimes; it was difficult to decipher how her Sight worked, seeing as Will hadn't been born with those kinds of abilities. She was capable of searching for a specific answer or event, but it was often the case that she would receive a vision she hadn't been looking for. The uninvited visions were often murky, difficult to make out. They could be about events that could happen in an hour's time or fifty years down the line. She was never sure.

But for her to have called him in the middle of the night and tell him she'd Seen his future was serious.

Whilst Alana had been the one to help Magdalena all those years ago, and had tried to shelter Will as much as she could in the aftermath of Magdalena's death, Alana was devout in her loyalty to the Coven. She had kept true to her word in not contacting Will once after he was officially exiled, and their meeting the other day at the Coven's compound had been the first time Will had seen her in eighteen years.

Why she was breaking those rules now, he didn't know.

"How did you even get my number?" Will asked gruffly.

"...you really want me to answer that?"

"Yes," he replied sharply. "I do."

"Raphael."

"Fuck," Will swore again. "Why did he…"

"I may have… Seen something that led me to believe you and him haven't exactly been adhering to the conditions of your exile. I confronted him about it and he outright denied everything at first."

"But then?"

"I told him I needed your number because your safety depends on my warning."

"And he gave it up?"

"He cares for you, Will."

Will scoffed. "Is that what he said?"

"All you need to know is that if it comes down to keeping you a secret to save his ass, or giving up the ruse to make sure you're safe, he picks your safety," Alana informed him sternly.

"You gonna tell Agnes and the other members of the Council?" Will asked softly.

“What good would that do?” she sighed heavily. “Whatever is going on between you two has been going on for years, from what I understand. The damage is already done.”

“I ended things with him,” Will told her. “Just so you know.”

“Uh-huh,” she replied, sounding unconvinced. “Can we get back to the topic of your possibly impending doom, please?”

“Alright, alright,” he muttered, getting up and pacing to the windows at the left of his bed, drawing the curtains back to survey the garden.

“I haven’t been sleeping so well, which is why I was up so late Scrying,” she began. “I wasn’t even thinking of you, or… or of Magdalena.”

Will remained silent, waiting for her to continue. He had never seen Alana purposefully Scry in person before, but she had visited Will and Magdalena once not longer after Will’s initiation into the Coven. As she’d been leaving the plantation, she’d walked past a mirror in the hallway, and had stopped abruptly, rooted to the spot. Her eyes had been fixed on the mirror, clouded over and her lips parted. Her hands had clenched into fists at her sides, and Will had watched in morbid fascination as she’d trembled before the mirror. Her eyes were fixed on the glass, but one look at her had told Will she wasn’t really seeing the reflection cast back from the mirror.

She’d been pulled into a vision, halted in her tracks by her Sight.

The sight of her powerless to her magic had never left Will. After Magdalena had died, he couldn't bear to look in a mirror unless absolutely necessary and had destroyed every reflective surface in the house except for the one small mirror in the bathroom.

“I Saw you, Will. I couldn’t tell where you were, or when it was happening,” she whispered, after a long pause.

Will knew if she was caught making this phone call to him there would be harsh consequences for her.

“It was dark,” she breathed. “Pitch black. I’ve never felt anywhere so devoid of light.”

Will’s stomach dropped, his mind immediately thinking of the darkness of the Netherworld. “Was I afraid?”

“Yes,” she replied, her voice so soft and quiet despite the fear so ardently laced into that one simple word.

“Was I alone?”

“Yes.”

Will drew in a deep, shuddering breath, emotion overwhelming him all of a sudden. “Was I hurt?”

“You were. I couldn’t tell how badly, but I could feel your pain. You were screaming. Begging for your life,” she confessed, her voice shaking as Will recognised the sound of her choking up on her own tears. “I’m sorry, Will.”

“How long did it last?” he asked, pushing down on his own fear and hurt that rose within him.

“I can’t be sure,” she admitted. “But you were trying to break free from something. You were… you were starting to run out of air.”

“Jesus Christ,” Will muttered, pressing his forehead against the cool pane of glass of the window he stood at.

“I’m so sorry, Will. I don’t even know when it will happen, or what you can do to change the course of this,” she mumbled. “I’ll keep looking. I-I’ll keep looking, Will, I swear.”

“Is there any point?” Will asked, hating the tremor in his voice. “All of your visions come to pass, Lana. If you’ve seen this in my future, what’s the point in trying to See anything else?”

“Don’t do that,” she snapped suddenly. “Don’t just lay down and accept it, for God’s sake. We can do something about this - if I can just See the trail of events that lead up to it, I can - ”

“Lana,” he cut her off gently, “please don’t. You’ve already risked enough by calling me tonight, you *and* Raphael. I don’t want you to put yourselves at risk of the Coven finding out we’ve been in touch.”

“They never should have exiled you,” Alana blurted out suddenly, her voice gritty and dripping in disdain. “What they did to you, Will, I - I’m sorry. It was wrong.”

“The ancestors made their claim on my fate,” he smiled softly, sadly, even though she couldn’t see him. “I don’t dispute what the Coven decided. I had to pay for what I did.”

“You paid ten times over for it,” Alana disagreed, her words turning morose over the line. “The things you went through… we should have taken you in, looked after you. Magdalena would be turning in her grave if she knew how you’d been treated after her death.”

“A death I was responsible for,” he reminded her, staring blankly at the dark gardens below him. “I created this mess. Let me live with it.”

“She had a choice that night,” Alana rebuked. “She didn’t have to go after you alone. If there had been more of us, no one would have had to have died. We could have done something together, as a fucking Coven like we should have. She knew what would happen if she went after you alone, and she did it anyway.”

“She traded places with me,” Will said, his voice sounding so small. “She gave her life to the Ritual, to the Law, so I could live. I didn’t deserve that. I never have.”

Silence rang down the line between them, both at a loss for words. Will blinked, his gaze refocusing on the thick clusters of cypress trees along the river bank.

“I’m sorry,” he apologised roughly, swallowing the lump in his throat that appeared whenever he thought of the night Magdalena had died. “I don’t mean to dredge up the past. Thank you for calling, Lana. I… it’s probably best you don’t contact me again.”

“I don’t care if I get found out,” Alana said icily. “Fuck them. If I See something, I won’t just sit by and let it go ignored. I’m going to tell you, Will. Let me help.”

“I don’t need your help,” he said carefully, his voice sad and soft. “Goodbye, Alana.”

He hung up and switched his cell off before she could call him back, throwing his phone back onto the bed. Just as he reached to close the curtains again, he saw it.

A figure stood at the treeline.

The clattering of feet down the stairs awoke Jimmy immediately, light sleeper that he was.

That, and the fact every lamp and overhead light, every wall sconce and every unlit candle erupted into light, bathing the house aglow in the dark.

“What the fuck -”

Jimmy barely had time to blink before he saw Will’s form storming past the ajar living room door through the hallway. Zeller sat up on the sofa opposite him, rubbing at his eyes and throwing his blankets back.

“What’s going on?” he grumbled, slowly getting to his feet.

They both jumped out of their skin at the sound of the front door being thrown open and slammed shut again.

Jimmy swallowed. “I don’t know what’s going on, but I don’t think this is good.”

Jack’s heavy gait announced his presence before he appeared at the doorway, Bev blinking and disgruntled behind him, both in their pyjamas. “Was that Will? Why are all the lights on?”

“He went out the front door,” Jimmy answered, already shoving his bare feet into his shoes and making for the exit. “Something is wrong.”

Zeller rolled his eyes, crossing his arms over his chest. “This is just some dumb witch bullshit he probably does all the time. Leave him to it. He’s probably out harvesting his moon water or whatever the fuck it is witches do at three… three…”

All four of them turned to look at the numbers blazing on the small digital clock sitting on a table next to Zeller’s sofa.

03:33 am.

“Shit,” Jack cursed.

They turned and ran for the front door, leaving Zeller to stand in the living room.

Will sensed his friends tumbling out of the house and calling his name behind him, their voices floating to him across the downwards slope of the garden as he bolted for the treeline.

The figure remained unmoving, cloaked in shadows.

He heard the minute they hit the invisible barrier that had been activated around his home, soft ‘ *oofs* ’ as they were thrown back on their asses upon coming into contact with the barrier.

It was a spell he had cast a long time around the perimeter of the house, extending to about half way down the garden. It formed a dome around the building, entirely invisible, but it stopped everything from getting out and prevented anything from getting in - alive or dead, human or not. The spell had lain dormant until tonight, when Will’s magic had sprung forth to bring the barrier to life, assisted by a few words of activation in the Old Tongue. His magic had run wild, making the electricity in the house stutter and flicker on and off, flames erupting and bursting forth in fireplaces and at candle wicks.

His magic curled around him now as he neared the figure, desperate to be unleashed, begging to let him take the backseat and release Hell on the intruder.

As Will grew closer, shadows began to curl over his hands and dance around his calves as he moved, the figure slowly taking a step back - as if it were wary of Will. The figure spoke, its voice curving through the night in a low whistle, halting Will in his tracks.

“ *A message, from Magdalena* ,” it hissed in the Old Tongue.

His magic *crackled* with sheer power as it slithered around his shoulders, similar to the way Eesha draped herself around his neck.

“Who are you?” he demanded, refusing to answer back in the Old Tongue.

“She wishes for you to accept the help of the Seer,” its voice responded, ignoring his question.

Its voice was warbled, twisted, as if the words in English had to be dragged through its vocal cords. It remained cloaked in shadow, any discerning features utterly hidden. Will’s magic was not threatened, per say, by its presence; it seemed to recognise the shadows and the Chaos lingering around its form as kin.

“Show yourself to me,” Will insisted, fighting the urge to lunge for the figure.

Behind him, Bev, Jack and Jimmy were pounding against the barrier, yelling for him.

“Magdalena,” the voice croaked once again, “has told me to pass one more message along to you.”

“How can I trust what you say?” Will spat. “How do I know you’re not a servant of Belial? Another demon attempting to mislead me with lies?”

“The Light of the Body,” the thing hissed at him.

Will felt the air tremble and shudder as the figure disappeared from sight, vanishing into the shadows of the trees behind it.

Jack, Beverly and Jimmy watched in relief as Will stormed back up the slope of the garden towards them, his face like thunder even in the shadows around them.

With a flick of his hand, the impenetrable wall that had trapped them disappeared, and Jimmy stumbled forwards from where he had been pressing against it.

“You want to explain what the hell is going on?” Jack demanded, glaring at Will.

“A spectre,” Will snapped back at him, not meeting any of their gazes. “It’s fine. You can all relax.”

“Will - what was that *thing* keeping us trapped here?” Bev demanded, hands on her hips.

“A protective seal, of sorts,” Will sighed in response, seeming to deflate in exhaustion. “It’s a barrier to stop anything getting in or out of the house. I raised it to protect you, not to keep you trapped - I needed to be sure the spectre wasn’t malevolent.”

“Spectre?” Jimmy deadpanned.

“I’ll lend you a Grimoire, you can read all about them,” Will responded dryly. “Come on, let’s all just get back inside. I’m sorry for - ”

Will was cut off by a strangled, bloodcurdling scream from the house, all four of them freezing.

“Zeller!” Jimmy yelled, turning and pitching back to the plantation.

The others followed, running in through the front door to where Zeller’s shrieks became ear-piercing.

They were coming from upstairs. Upstairs, where Will had explicitly forbidden any of them from going.

“Brian!” Jack bellowed, the team scrambling up the stairs.

They rounded the last step, pivoting down the corridor of the upstairs hallway to find Zeller cowering on the floor, curled into a ball in on himself. The door he was in front of was ajar, and Eesha’s humongous body was raised up in front him, her jaws agape and hissing violently.

“Will! Will, get rid of the fucking snake!” Zeller screamed, cowering even further back into the floor as Eesha lurched for him.

She moved not to strike him, but to get him to scramble away from the door, which he did.

Will left her to it, nostrils flaring in anger as he strode forwards. He ignored Zeller whimpering on the floor, instead slamming the door shut of the room he had tried to sneak into.

“ *It’s alright, love,”* Will whispered to Eesha, crouching down and holding his hand out to her. “ *Thank you for minding the house in my absence.* ”

Eesha spat and hissed one more time at Zeller before lowering her head, her lithe, shiny body making its way to Will’s outstretched hand.

“That thing could have killed me!” Zeller spluttered, clambering back against the wall, breathing raggedly. “You’re fucking insane! Letting that *thing* roam around the house, it’ll attack us all in our sleep!”

“Eesha wouldn’t have killed you,” Will replied coldly, the look he sent Zeller one of pure contempt as he rose to his feet with his Familiar.

“It damn near tried!”

Will leant forwards a little, his eyes blazing in a way that made Zeller’s breath catch. “Then perhaps you should have listened to me when I said no one was allowed upstairs, under any circumstance. You were asking for trouble.”

“This is ridiculous,” Bev muttered behind them. “Who the hell has a guard snake?”

“She’s my Familiar,” Will spat in response, rounding on her. “Now, could you all please go back downstairs and go the fuck to sleep?”

“Asleep?” Zeller scoffed. “After what I saw in that room?”

Will froze.

“What do you mean, Zeller?” Jack asked, grumpy and tired.

Zeller shakily got to his feet, trembling lips pressed together tightly. “I mean, Jack, that Will has some explaining to do.”

Will slowly turned to look back at him, a dark fire flickering in his eyes. “Whatever it is you *think* you saw, you have no idea what you’re dealing with here, Brian.”

“Oh yeah? Then do you want to explain to us why the hell you have your own personal ossuary in that room?”

Jack, Bev and Jimmy paled, eyes darting to Will, who said nothing.

“What’s he talking about, Will?” Jack asked slowly, his voice guarded.

“That room is full to the brim with *skeletons* ,” Zeller hissed. “Full blown skeletons - lined up on trays upon trays stacked on top of each other, like his own fucking personal mausoleum. Now I don’t care what sort of bullshit excuse about magic or witchcraft you have for what I saw in there, there’s no explaining away why your home is full of bones!”

Will took a deep breath, dragging his hand over his face, muttering something under his breath that none of the others quite caught - except it made the viper coiled around his arm and shoulders slither off of his body, dropping to the floor and disappearing back into the shadows of Will’s open bedroom door.

Will laughed, dry and forced, before stepping forwards towards the room Zeller had been snooping around. He wrenched open the door, throwing it open, and gestured wildly into the room.

“Go ahead. Look for yourselves.”

Jimmy went first, toeing his way into the room and scanning the dim interior. Jack followed, then Beverly, and then finally Zeller, who flinched as he drew near to Will.

Will stood back and watched them all as they spun in slow circles, eyes wide. Then, one by one, they all turned and frowned at Zeller.

“Brian… it’s an empty room,” Jack pointed out. “There’s nothing here.”

And there wasn’t; the room was utterly barren. Not a single piece of furniture. Just floorboards, an empty fireplace and a window with thin netted curtains.

“But… but I saw it,” Zeller protested, eyes widening in horror. “There was - there were these trays, like fucking medical gurneys, all stacked on top of each other. There was a full blown skeleton on each one, I swear!”

“I think the last few days are getting to us all,” Jack said in consolation, sharing a fleeting look with Bev. “We’re all tired. The shadows can play tricks on us.”

“No, Jack, no!” Zeller insisted, spinning around in a circle, desperately looking for some sign. “They were here, I know they were!”

“It’s an old house,” Will said quietly. “It has a way of making you feel and see things that aren’t always there.”

“You,” Zeller spat accusingly, rounding on Will. “You did something, didn’t you?”

Will shook his head firmly, filing out of the room. “No, Zeller. Now, if you’ll all please get back down stairs? And respect my request that you don’t come up here again? The energy up here isn’t always safe if you’re… well, if you’re not a witch.”

“What do you mean?” Bev asked pointedly, following Will out.

“It’s always been this way,” Will answered, his voice sounding far away as he continued down the hall to his bedroom. “Something about the house. It was abandoned at one point in history, after it ceased to be a working plantation, then a witch took up residence here. From what I can gather, her magic seeped into the structure of the house so much it can alter your perception of reality.”

“He’s lying,” Zeller growled.

Will waved his hand, not even looking behind him, and suddenly the door slammed shut, the noise echoing throughout the house.

“We’re exhausted,” Jack said again, giving Zeller a clap on the shoulder. “Let’s talk about this in the morning, alright? We need to be focussed, and right now we’re just about holding it together.”

“But…” Zeller trailed off.

Will lingered in the doorway of his dark bedroom, watching them all as he leant against the doorframe. One by one, all the lights that had burst to life in Will’s manic outburst before shut out, sending the house into near darkness again.

The team mumbled their goodnights to each other, but Zeller lingered at the top of the stairs, jaw clenched and staring at Will.

“You’re hiding something,” he half hissed, half whispered. “And I’m gonna find out exactly what it is.”

Will lifted a brow, looking him up and down. “Like Jack said, Zeller. The shadows can play tricks on us. Be careful.”

With that, the witch slipped inside his bedroom, leaving Zeller standing by the stairs with clenched fists and a thundering heartbeat.

Chapter End Notes

03:33 am - The Witching hour or Devil's hour. A time of night that is associated with supernatural events, whereby witches, demons and ghosts are thought to appear and be at their most powerful. Definitions vary, and include the hour immediately after midnight and the time between 3:00 am and 4:00 am.

Spectre - a visible disembodied spirit. It takes a large amount of Energy for a spectre to make itself physically visible, meaning a spectre can only show itself for a short period of time, usually no more than a few minutes.

Ossuary - a container or room in which the bones of dead people are placed.

Sixteen

Chapter Notes

2 Peter 2:4-10
For if God did not spare the angels when they sinned, but cast them into hell and committed them to pits of nether gloom to be kept until the judgement; if he did not spare the ancient world, but preserved Noah, a herald of righteousness, with seven other persons, when he brought a flood upon the world of the ungodly; if by turning the cities of Sodom and Gomor'rah to ashes he condemned them to extinction and made them an example to those who were to be ungodly; and if he rescued righteous Lot, greatly distressed by the licentiousness of the wicked (for by what that righteous man saw and heard as he lived among them, he was vexed in his righteous soul day after day with their lawless deeds), then the Lord knows how to rescue the godly from trial, and to keep the unrighteous under punishment until the day of judgement, and especially those who indulge in the lust of defiling passion and despise authority.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

" - and the Holy Spirit, as it was in the beginning, is now, and forever shall be. Amen."

"Will?"

"O my Jesus, forgive us our sins, save us from the fires of Hell, lead all souls to Heaven, especially those in most need of Thy mercy."

The witch was kneeling, head bowed, rosary clutched between his clasped together hands as his thumb and index finger slid along the chained beads of the device, halfway through praying the Glorious Mysteries. Hannibal considered calling his name again, but then slowly lowered himself down to sit beside Will in the pew.

He watched in curious silence as Will continued with his next decade of his rosary, lips moving in a trembling whisper as he prayed. When he was done, some ten minutes later, he made the sign of the cross with the crucifix at the end of rosary, before pressing the metal to his lips in a brief kiss and opening his eyes.

He rose slowly, sitting down next to Hannibal on the pew, not looking at the older man.

"Hello, Hannibal."

"Hello, Will. I'm sorry to have disturbed you."

"You're not," Will sighed, not looking at him, keeping his eyes forward. "Why are you here?"

“For you, of course.”

The corners of Will’s lips twitched into a smile, and he tilted his head slightly in Hannibal’s direction, but still kept his eyes on the altar. “Well, you found me. What now?”

Hannibal followed Will’s gaze to where it rested on the tabernacle behind the altar. “I was hoping you’d be willing to show me the site you wish to lay our trap in.”

Will went still beside him. “With the others?”

“No. Just you and I.”

Hannibal waited for his response, but it never came. He twisted to look at Will, studying the way his lashes brushed his cheek when he blinked, the solid line of his nose and chin in the side-profile Hannibal had of him. His gaze fell to Will’s hands, resting on his lap, tattooed fingers still clutching his rosary.

“‘I’m sorry to have disturbed you here,” Hannibal said softly. “I went to the house to find you after you weren’t answering your calls, but Jack said you’d been gone for hours.”

“How’d you know I’d be here?”

“I didn’t, not at first. But then I remembered that you told me this is where you came when you first arrived in New Orleans as a teenager. I wondered if it was still somewhere you retreated to when you are troubled.”

The basilica was quiet at this hour, closing time nearing for the St. Louis cathedral, but the odd worshipper and tourist still lingered. He’d found Will in the second row from the front, alone and kneeling when he’d first walked in.

Will lowered his head, closing his eyes. “I’m curious as to why you thought I’d want to be found here.”

“I didn’t think you would be,” Hannibal responded candidly, shrugging. “However, time is slipping away from us.”

It had been three days since Hannibal had seen Will at the FBI’s New Orleans field office. Three whole days since he’d last laid eyes upon the witch, with his startling blue irises and devilishly sharp tongue. Three days since he’d crowded against Will’s back and grazed his lips against his skin, letting his hands wander over the Necromancer’s body.

Hannibal could wait no more.

He’d gone straight to Will’s home, to find Jack and the rest of the team, but no Will. Jack had informed him that Will had been gone for most of the day, and for the past three days had locked himself away in the library upstairs after a strange incident had occurred a few nights ago.

“Something has happened, hasn’t it?” Hannibal asked gently when Will persisted with his silence.

“I came here hoping for answers,” Will. “I’m… I’m at a loss as to what the best thing to do is, with the situation I’ve found myself in.”

“And has God answered your questions?” Hannibal pressed.

Will smiled sadly, finally glancing at Hannibal. “I asked for guidance. For strength. And then you appear.”

Hannibal’s answering grin was wide, something glimmering in his eyes that Will couldn’t quite place. “Ah. So I am sent by the Lord to deliver your strength, am I?”

Will huffed a dry, sarcastic laugh. “Maybe you’re an angel sent by the most high.”

Hannibal went very still, very quiet besides him, so much so that Will turned to look at him, frowning. His previously relaxed posture was now tense, his jaw tight and his face unreadable. He tapped a single finger against the pew he sat on mindlessly, the action striking Will as odd; Hannibal was always purposeful. He never fidgeted.

And yet now, here he was - *restless* .

“What is it?”

Hannibal shook his head, eyes tracing over the statues and gold before them surrounding the altar. “Forgive me, Will. I do not share in your devotion and faith in God. Perhaps once, He and I were close, but there has been an irreparable fissure between your God and myself for a long time now.”

“Hannibal, what - have I upset you? I didn’t mean anything by it, my comment about angels and…,” Will trailed off, shaking his head and sighing. “Sorry. I know it’s not for everyone. But you did come here of your own volition to find me, so…”

The smooth, charming smile snapped back in place and Hannibal’s eyes were filled with warmth once more as he looked back at Will. He smoothed his white button down out as he stood, nodding to the front of the church.

“You’re right. But I would like you to show me the house you are planning on setting the trap in. Shall we?”

“I never agreed to that,” Will mumbled, but stood regardless and shuffled out of the pew behind Hannibal.

As they walked down the aisle side by side towards the exit, Will felt a tug, deep within him where he imagined his magic lay dormant most of the time. He stopped, Hannibal pausing by him.

“Something wrong?” the professor asked, gaze sweeping hungrily over the Necromancer.

Will frowned, one ink covered hand absentmindedly drifting to rest just above his navel. “I… no. I just felt…”

He shook his head, sighing, and marching forwards without further explanation. Hannibal wordlessly followed, falling into step beside him.

He felt eyes on the back of his neck the whole time.

“You didn’t answer my question before, at the cathedral,” Hannibal announced, breaking the silence in the car.

Will had walked to the French Quarter to visit the cathedral this morning, needing the pounding of his soles on the ground to focus him and calm him. Hannibal had driven in, his car parked a few blocks away from the St. Louis cathedral.

“Question ‘bout what?” Will grumbled, his drawl thickening a little in his tiredness as he rubbed at his temples, headache clustering there.

“Jack told me something happened the other night, that I was best asking you to explain it. What happened?”

“Nothing too concerning,” Will lied easily with the release of a long, weary breath.

“He said, and these are his words, not mine - that you were ‘spooked’. What happened, Will?” Hannibal asked a little more firmly. “I’ve been worried about you these last few days, you know. The silence between us had me concerned.”

Will bit the inside of his cheek, mulling over his answer. “There was a spectre on the grounds, by the river that cuts through my garden.”

“Fascinating,” Hannibal murmured. “I have seen spectres occasionally, on the rare instances I have been privy to shadow magic during my travels. The last spectre I saw was during a séance in Cairo ten years ago.”

“It had a message for me.”

“It did? That’s unusual.”

“From Magdalena.”

“I see,” Hannibal murmured gently, his voice softening. “I’m sorry, Will. I can’t imagine it must have been an easy experience, least of all one you were expecting.”

“You learn to expect the unexpected when it comes to the Dead,” Will retorted nonchalantly.

“Still - it must have been difficult. What was the message?”

Wil swallowed. “Alana called me a few nights ago, even though my exile forbids her from doing so - she had a vision of me. I was trapped somewhere, alone and in the dark and I was hurt. The spectre said Magdalena wants me to accept Alana’s help and…”

“And?”

“The Light of the Body,” Will muttered, barely audible.

Hannibal drummed his fingers against the wheel. “Was that it? All that it said?”

“Yes,” Will answered, absently watching the scenery pass by as the car picked up speed a little. “I wasn’t sure what it meant at first. I started to wonder if the whole thing was a ruse, a trick being played by Belial to confuse me. I spent hours in the library, pouring over all of Magdalena’s diaries and her personal Grimoires. And then it clicked.”

“Oh?”

“The Gospel of Luke,” Will murmured. “Chapter eleven, verses thirty-four to thirty-six.”

“Your eye is the lamp of your body; when your eye is sound, your whole body is full of light; but when it is not sound, your body is full of darkness. Therefore be careful lest the light in you be darkness. If then your whole body is full of light, having no part dark, it will be wholly bright, as when a lamp with its rays gives you light,” Hannibal recited perfectly, the words rolling off his tongue with practised ease.

“Not bad, for someone who doesn’t ascribe to the whole Christianity thing,” Will laughed, impressed at the easy recall of knowledge.

Hannibal shrugged. “The Bible is full of interesting teachings. I just simply don’t believe in nor follow them.”

Will’s cheeks flushed as he immediately thought of Hannibal’s lips on his skin.

“What does it have to do with anything, though? Why would Magdalena send you a cryptic message about some random Gospel extract?” Hannibal queried as the car turned off from the road, beginning its slow descent down the dirt track that led to the abandoned house Will had picked out.

“It’s not cryptic,” Will disagreed. “If it really was her that was sending the message, it has meaning.”

“And have you discerned what that meaning is yet?”

“I have my theories.”

“Care to share?”

Will pressed his lips together; he didn’t care to share, actually, but didn’t quite know why. He’d been on edge since the night the spectre visited, since Alana’s phone call, and for some reason he didn’t want to divulge anything to Hannibal about it. His stomach fluttered with pulses of his magic warning him, his power stirring restlessly as he considered telling Hannibal the truth.

The particular scripture Magdalena had led him to in the Gospel of Luke was a stark reminder to be cautious about what he allowed into his life and allowed himself to see. *Therefore be careful lest the light in you be darkness* - a warning that despite the many things

in this world that seemed bright, their nature could be deceptive. Unhealthy eyes were not able to perceive the truth of darkness masquerading as light.

How sound had Will's vision been as of late?

Will glanced at Hannibal, studying the sharp lines of his cheekbones and aristocratic profile. "Can I ask you something?"

"Answering a question with a question?" Hannibal quipped playfully, smiling.

Will rolled his eyes, unbuckling his belt as the car slowed to a halt outside the dilapidated French Colonial not too dissimilar to his own home. "Well, can I?"

"Of course."

"What were you doing, before this? Before Jack asked you to come down here and consult?"

"I was in Baltimore, which has been my permanent base for the last twenty years," Hannibal replied smoothly, unclipping his own belt. "Preparing to write a paper on witchcraft and shamanism amongst the Lisu people in Northern Thailand. I was due to travel there for research."

Will narrowed his eyes. "And you just dropped the chance to do all of that to come here?"

"Of course I did - when Jack reached out to me, there was no doubt in my mind that I wished to be of assistance to you and to him. My research and impending travel to Thailand can wait."

"How exactly did Jack hear about you? Why did he choose *you* , of all people, to be involved in this?" Will continued, hoping he wasn't blundering his way into making Hannibal feel like this was an interrogation.

He wasn't always the best with words, or being delicate of people's feelings.

"I suppose someone recommended me to him," Hannibal answered. "I'm not quite sure of the precise details - I can only assume because I am more well known for my work on demonology and death cults, that is why I was sought out."

"Why Baltimore?"

Hannibal blinked, smiling softly at the rapid-fire questioning. "I was new to the States. There was an opening in the Anthropology Department at John Hopkins, so I took a chance, and the rest is history."

"You must have been pretty renowned already to have landed a job at John Hopkins, just like that."

"They were impressed by the amount of primary research and fieldwork I had under my belt."

“And what about before that? Before you went to Baltimore?”

“I was here, there and everywhere,” Hannibal answered honestly. “I had my nose to the ground constantly, searching out any coven or witch who would have me and allow me to study their practices and history. I sought out hotspots of unusual activity, visited hidden temples and ruins from thousands of years ago. I was hungry for the other side of life people did not see. I always have been.”

“You mentioned your family was… that they were killed.”

Hannibal looked away, his grip on the door handle tightening slightly. “Yes. I would appreciate it if you understood it is a… tricky subject for me to broach.”

“I understand,” Will replied, and he *did* . Probably more than anyone else ever would. “Can you at least tell me about Lithuania?”

Hannibal clucked his tongue, opening the door. Will followed suit, watching the professor survey the French Colonial before them as they gradually approached it, drawing nearer.

“A lifetime ago, now,” Hannibal said, his voice detached and devoid of emotion. “It is merely the place where I grew up. I haven’t been back there since I was a very small child, and have no intentions of returning. There is nothing there for me anymore.”

Will made his way to the rotting entrance of the building, stepping into the shadows of the dilapidated structure. He turned and looked at Hannibal, cocking his head in curiosity as he surveyed the other man.

“One more question?” Will requested.

Hannibal’s expression shifted, his eyes watching Will with a possessiveness that made him shiver, his mouth stretching into a predatory grin. “How could I say no to you?”

Always answering questions with questions.

“You must have seen so much,” Will started carefully, stepping back into the shadows a little further, walking backwards. “Met countless witches, experienced the seemingly impossible.”

Glass crunched underfoot. Hannibal took one step forwards as Will took one back, disliking even the smallest distance between them.

“Ask your question, Will,” Hannibal murmured, prowling forwards.

Will’s face was nearly swallowed by the shadows the further he moved back into the abandoned house, darkness trying to engulf him.

“All the things you’ve seen and experienced - what scared you the most?”

Hannibal stopped, simply watching Will as the witch hovered on the edge of darkness.

“I don’t believe I’ve found it… yet.”

The building reeked of damp and decay, beams splintering overhead, floorboards groaning underfoot.

“It’s far enough out of the way that no one will see anything happen,” Will explained as they cautiously walked through the building, lighting the way with the torches on their cell phones. “But accessible enough for Jack to get a squad down here and set up around the property. Plenty of hiding spots and vantage points if he thinks a sniper is necessary.”

Hannibal raised a brow, scanning the rot in the ceiling above them. “Do you believe a sniper will be necessary?”

“No. I can handle him myself.”

“You sound so sure of yourself.”

Will set his cell down on a long table, presumably a dining table, covered in a dust sheet, torch facing up. “Try to attack me.”

“Excuse me?”

“I mean it. Put your cell down and come for me.”

“Why would I do that?”

“I want you to know why I sound sure of myself.”

Hannibal regarded him for a long moment, then gently set his cell next to Will’s on the dust sheet. “Are you sure?”

Will simply nodded, eyes swimming with mirth in the limited light and his jaw set tightly. Hannibal circled him, eyes raking up and down Will’s form, the witch not bothering to turn with him and keep his eyes on Hannibal and letting the professor have his back.

Hannibal lunged forwards at Will’s right side, fist clenched and arm raised, only to find himself tossed backwards through the air like a ragdoll - jerking to a halt and frozen momentarily before he could careen into the pile of broken dining chairs behind him.

He felt Will’s magic, its invisible grip, drop him gently to his feet. He staggered, winded and gasping for air, and grinning at Will with a feral glint in his eyes that made Will’s magic ripple deliciously inside of him.

“Again.”

Hannibal raced for him, only to find shadows lashing around his throat, lifting him just enough so that only his toes brushed the rotting floorboards beneath them. Will’s magic released him quickly, and Hannibal’s hands went around his neck in the sudden absence of the mist-like shadows that had caught him. His skin prickled, electric.

“And what if our killer is a match for you?” Hannibal asked, a little short of breath.

Will didn't miss the way his pupils had dilated.

"They're welcome to try," Will murmured. "But their evocations and runes were sloppy, unpractised. They seem far too *new* to all of this judging by the state of the crime scenes I've seen. I doubt they have magic that parallels mine."

"Some might say you're being arrogant," Hannibal teased, reaching for his cell again.

Will picked his back up too, glancing around the rest of the dining room. "There's a reason Agnes is scared of me."

Hannibal recalled Will's slip of power at the meeting at the Coven's compound, how he'd cracked the table in two and nearly shattered every window in its frame, how the clouds had masked the sun and sank the day into darkness.

Will led him through a doorway at the back of the dining room, into a smaller room that maybe had once been a study or modest library. It was clear of furniture, but the walls were still lined with built in cases and shelves, the glass from the windows all smashed through and littering the floor with general debris and dead leaves.

"Here," Will announced. "This room. This is where I'll wait for our killer."

"And how do you plan to apprehend him, if he takes the bait and follows you here?"

"Magic, of course," Will chuckled dryly. "I can cast a temporary necrosis on him, render him immobile until Jack and his lackeys come in and take over."

"Ah yes," Hannibal replied, a little sourly, "the same trick you inflicted upon poor, unsuspecting Raphael last week."

Will turned, looking at him. "The very same."

Neither of them spoke then, merely observing each other in the dim, waning light of the rundown French Colonial. Until, Hannibal stepped closer, closing the distance between them. Will held his ground, refusing to look away as Hannibal used his height to invade Will's space.

And then, bolstered with a newfound boldness that came from some hidden depth, he asked:

"Is it later, yet?"

Hannibal answered with a searing, claiming kiss.

His mouth was hot and demanding against Will's, hands encircling Will's upper arms and pulling him close. Bodies flush, Will relished the sensation of Hannibal firm, sturdy presence against him. His own hands crept around Hannibal's neck, inked fingers threading through soft, ashy strands of hair at his nape. Hannibal slowly walked them backwards, tongues dancing, until Will's back hit the wall with a soft *thud* . Hannibal slotted a knee between Will's legs, knocking them apart.

Will groaned as their groins rolled against each other, Hannibal's answering hardness to his own making him shudder.

"I dreamt about you," Will confessed between kisses.

"Tell me?" Hannibal requested roughly, sucking at Will's pulse where it throbbed in his neck.

"You got on your knees for me," Will answered, grinning as Hannibal kissed along the body of the Ourobors around his throat.

"Did I?" Hannibal chuckled, before slowly, slowly sinking to kneel before Will. "Something like this?"

"Yeah," Will choked out, near whimpering at the sight. "Yeah, just like that."

Long, dexterous fingers made quick work of his belt buckle and fly , tugging his shirt out of where it had been tucked into his slacks and pushing it up his belly. Hannibal moaned at the sight of pale skin covered in tattoos.

"I think about these all the time," Hannibal told him, voice low rumbling. "All these inked symbols and signs, how many you're hiding beneath your clothes."

Will gasped as Hannibal raked his teeth over the *Scutum Fidei* tattoo on his left hip bone, opposite the crucifix on his right - Will could have sworn he felt the ink embedded into his dermis prickle with heat at the older man's touch. Hannibal worked his underwear and slacks down just enough for his cock to spring free, his lips immediately skimming along his straining length in an open mouthed kiss.

"Fuck," Will gasped, head knocking back against the wall.

Hannibal held him in place by pressing against his thighs and then sucked the tip into his mouth. The sensation made Will shiver, grasping the smooth strands of Hannibal's hair tightly as he worked over Will's cock.

In an alarmingly similar fashion to his dream, Hannibal sucked him expertly, lathering Will with his tongue and hollowing his cheeks with each slow, teasing movement up his length, flicking his tongue against Will's slit.

"Not gonna last if you do me like that," Will groaned, panting.

Hannibal pulled off momentarily, smiling deviously. "That is the point, is it not? Or would you rather I get you all worked up, lead you right up to the edge, and then leave you wanting?"

"No," Will blurted out immediately. "No, please. Don't stop."

"That's it," Hannibal praised him softly, kissing his shaft once more. "Take what I give you."

Hannibal's words alone pushed him into the brink of his orgasm, and with his mouth sealed along Will's cock again, sucking and bobbing his head, Will was squirming and wriggling desperately beneath him.

"So good," he panted, eyes screwed shut, "feels so good, Hannibal."

When Hannibal's fist enclosed around the base of him, pulling back to suck and kiss at his tip, Will lost it.

He came with a shout, clutching at Hannibal's shoulders, scrambling for purchase as his orgasm was ripped from him. He spurted into Hannibal's mouth, breathless and dizzy as he shook with each wave of his orgasm. Hannibal swallowed him down expertly, rubbing his tongue against the underside of his cock and watching from his knees with rapt eyes.

When Will pushed him back, oversensitive and overstimulated as the professor kept sucking, Hannibal knelt and looked at him through heavy lids and parted lips. He looked at him as if he wanted to consume Will, devour him entirely, desire rolling from him in waves.

"Better than your dream?" Hannibal asked, stroking his palms down Will's twitching thighs.

Will gulped, trying to regain his breath as he blinked in a near delirium at the older man on his knees before him. "Yes. Better… better than the dream. So much better, I…"

Hannibal rose to his feet slowly, as if he was worried he'd startle Will. He gradually closed the distance between them, kissing Will softly, sweetly, as if he hadn't just wrenched a toe curling orgasm out of the Necromancer.

"This…" Will panted, trailing off. "This still doesn't mean we're…"

"How did you phrase it the other day?" Hannibal hummed, tracing the startlingly realistic eye tattooed into Will's palm, fingertips grazing the raised line of scar tissue over the ink from where Will had slit his palm and spilt his blood countless times. "Entangled, I believe."

Will swallowed, reaching for his slacks and underwear, tugging them back up and fastening his belt. "We have more important things to focus on."

"But what of after? When the hurly-burly's done, when the battle's lost and done?" Hannibal asked, teasingly smiling as he quoted one of Shakespeare's witches from *Macbeth* .

Will hesitated; there may not be an after. Not if his back up plan needed to be implemented, if he handed himself over to Belial in exchange for the killer they were hunting.

Not if Alana's vision came to fruition, which Will knew deep down in his gut was inevitable. There was a darkness creeping in at all corners of his visions as of late. Darkness that Magdalena was even warning him about from beyond the grave - and yet he saw no path that didn't end in the dark, in the shadows that knew him as kin and called to his magic.

"I suppose we'll just have to wait and see if there's another ' *later* '," Will breathed in answer, then pulled Hannibal forwards to kiss him again.

Chapter End Notes

Tabernacle - a fixed, locked box in which the Eucharist (consecrated communion hosts) is stored as part of the "reserved sacrament" rite.

Scutum Fidei - also known as the Shield of the Trinity. A symbol which expresses numerous aspects of the doctrine of the Holy Trinity. The symbol usually consists of four nodes (generally circular) interconnected by six links. The three nodes at the edge of the diagram are labelled with the names of the three persons of the Trinity (traditionally the Latin-language names): The Father ("PATER"), The Son ("FILIUS"), and The Holy Spirit ("SPIRITUS SANCTUS"). The node in the centre of the symbol (within the triangle formed by the other three nodes) is labelled God (Latin "DEUS"), while the three links connecting the centre node with the outer nodes are labelled "is" (Latin "EST"), and the three links connecting the outer nodes to each other are labelled "is not" (Latin "NON EST").

Seventeen

Chapter Notes

Isaiah 1:15
When you spread forth your hands,
I will hide my eyes from you;
even though you make many prayers,
I will not listen;
your hands are full of blood.

New Orleans, Fifteen Years Ago

Will gasped at the slice of the blade along his forearm, his stomach churning at the sight of his blood materialising from the wound. The dagger pierced deep, vertically down his arm along the veins pulsing with his lifeforce, the runes blazing aglow along the hilt and blade of the weapon in response to kissing his blood.

A small, tiny voice in the back of his head said that he'd cut too deep this time. He shoved it down; he didn't care.

" *Qum, o ruhah, qabl chayukh, nishmukh, b'mincha d'demi* ," Will breathed, his vision beginning to blur as darkness crept in at the edges of his eyes.

He fought against it, cautious that if he were to let his magic take over completely, there was no knowing what sort of Chaos it would inflict. Magdalena had taught him as much when he'd first began using his magic under her guidance - he'd lost count the amount of times he'd regained consciousness and found her sweeping up glass from shattered windows, smearing healing poultices along the burns his magic had lashed against her from being too close to him when he lost control.

The skeleton before him, carefully reconstructed into its correct anatomy after Will had pulled it from the soft clay depths of the Mississippi, twitched as his blood splattered over its ivory structure. His magic crept forth in the form of shadows, knitting between the gaps of the skeleton's bones, fusing its body back together in place of tendons and cartilage as the thing slowly began to move.

" *Ana m'nach l'kh d'demi, d'khayukh, d'khtakh d'akhra b'arta,"* Will chanted, wincing as the burning pain from the open wound on his arm flared, his nerves screaming.

Its skull turned towards him, empty sockets caked in mud staring eyeless-ly at him.

Will looked down at the blood still pouring forth from his forearm, gulping when the skeleton's hand creaked and reached forwards, the bones of its fingers settling over the wound that would not stop spurting forth blood. How much had he lost now?

Will weakly lifted his head, kneeling in front of the skeleton, and gave it a feeble smile. " *Ad d'ata sh'khina l'ara, k'deim d'khazita min'hu; l'afar ata, u'l'afar t'ashuv* ."

The candles around the circle snuffed out, and Will slumped, collapsing to his side with his cheek crushed against the harsh grains of the salt circle.

He wasn't sure how much time had passed when he woke again. It could have been days or hours for all he knew. His tongue stuck to the roof of his mouth, and his head throbbed. As he tried to move and sit up, he whimpered with the flaring pain that shot up his tender arm. The wound from his dagger had congealed, clotted over since he'd passed out, but the sheer amount of blood pooled around him told him he should have been dead.

Well and truly dead.

A clacking noise to his left made him twist his head from where he lay on the floor. The skeleton was still there, reaching out for him from where it rested next to him, its bones also sticky with Will's blood. Its jagged fingertips, nothing but bone, scraped over his cheek, still held together by the shadows of his magic.

"I really thought it would work this time," he croaked, breaking the silence and staring at the empty sockets that seemed to be fixed on him.

Send me back, dark one .

The voice slithered in through his ears like an invisible caress, sinking into his mind in a way that reminded him of fingers pressing in and kneading wet dough. He shuddered at the sensation.

"You don't want the gift I offer you?" he asked, hoarse and rasping.

The skeleton's hand wrapped around his forearm, clenching around the bloody mess of his skin. *No. I only ask that you release me* .

Will somehow managed to sit up, clamping the hand of his good arm over his mouth as he felt bile rise in his throat. The skeleton remained still, but turned its skull slowly to face upwards towards the ceiling, as if waiting.

Will blinked, his head swimming, as he looked around the room for the ashes he needed. He found the small jar sitting just at the edge of the large salt circle he'd created, and with a shuddering breath he focused on letting his magic sweep across the room and light the wicks of the candles once more. He unscrewed the glass jar with shaking hands, tipping the foul smelling ashes of the cindered ox heart into his palm.

The wound on his arm *ached* .

He knelt by the skeleton's side once more, eyes beginning to mist over with tears. A sob perched just under his chin, threatening to break free as he realised the irony of his success.

He'd tried to kill himself by performing the Ritual of Lazarus, yet again, but had failed by successfully carrying out the impossible ritual. It shouldn't be working like this; it *shouldn't* . The Ritual of Lazarus had almost killed him the first time round when he'd tried to resurrect his mother, and would have if it hadn't been for Magdalena's sacrifice. Every account, every history of Necromancy, detailed how the Necromancer's life was forfeit during the ritual - no one survived bringing the dead back. It was different to reanimation, in which Will could control the body of the dead with a flick of his wrist, like a mindless puppet. But the Ritual of Lazarus demanded soul for soul, for the dead to truly rise again and regain their sentience, their conscience and their soul.

So *why* was he not dead? How had he managed to survive losing all this blood, this damned blood stuck to his bare knees and legs like clotted jam? How had he managed to bring this creature back to life, give it back its sentience despite the fact it was nothing but bones, and live to tell the tale?

His head pounded with the sheer weight of his unanswered questions. Questions that no one could help him with. There was nobody now, no one to guide him and tell him how to survive with the snarling, ferocious magic that paced back and forth in his chest cavity like a beast waiting to be unleashed. He knew no other Necromancer, no other witch who could help. Magdalena was gone, and he was exiled from the Coven.

He had nothing, no one. Just the bodies and skeletons he ripped from the Earth in desperate attempts to take their places.

Will swallowed his pain, his anguish and his frustration, and began to chant the incantation. He blew the dark ashes from his palm across the skeleton and tipped his head back, eyes closing and palms facing skywards on his bare thighs.

Tears slipped past his closed lids as he felt the air shift around him, felt his magic crawl round the circle and mist-like shadows curl against him. Magdalena's words rang in his head like a hammer brought down on an anvil:

Your magic is dark by its very nature, Will. It is never satisfied, never sated. It hungers for more, always; it wants to revel in the demolition it is capable of. It is starving for destruction, unless you learn to control it. Unless you close the ***fucking circle*** .

"I'm sorry, Mags," Will whispered into the air.

He opened his eyes again, staring at the skeleton he knelt before. It was lifeless once more, simply a pile of bones in the circle.

On shaking legs, Will rose and stepped out of the circle, swaying on his feet from the blood loss as he somehow managed to stagger to the door and leave the chaos he'd created behind him. He neglected the candles to burn down to stumps, not caring if they somehow managed to catch and set the house on fire.

He left the circle open.

Will laid in bed for a whole week. The Ritual of Lazarus had drained him, as had the blood loss. He let the wound fester, staring at it as pus oozed around the crusted skin and fever set in.

Perhaps the infection would finish him off, a death by sepsis as he watched the necrosis settle in.

He wasn't sure how much weight he lost in that week, sustaining himself on nothing but mouthfuls of water from old bottles strewn around his bed on the floor, but by the time the week was over he could count all of his ribs and his stomach was concave. When he touched his stubble covered face, there were hollows beneath his cheeks and around his eye sockets that hadn't been there before.

He would have continued to lay there and waste away to nothing, let himself turn into a twin of the skeleton he'd resurrected, but his magic rampaged against him from within. It seemed to sink its teeth into the infection spreading up his arm, and he watched in fascination as his veins turned black, pulsing like a spiderweb, as his magic twisted itself into the heart of the wound and set to work fighting the infection.

He crawled from the bed, shuffling downstairs on his ass and reached the kitchen somehow. He ripped into every packet, every tin, every jar he could find and ate until he threw up, his stomach rejecting so much sustenance after a week of starvation.

He downed pints of water, and then passed out again on the kitchen floor.

The next time he awoke, Eesha was coiled around his wounded arm tightly, her eyes fixated on his face. He felt somewhat better, if he could really describe it as that, enough that he was able to stumble back to the room he conducted his rituals in. When he pushed open the door, he was met with the sight of the skeleton abandoned in the circle, his blood a black, crusted substance dried into the floorboards. He took a deep breath and steeled himself, preparing for the clean up.

Hours later, when he'd scrubbed as much of his blood off the floor as he was capable of in his weakened state and had carefully laid the skeleton out on a tray of its own in what he'd sarcastically begun to dub the Bone Room, Will was near slipping into unconsciousness again. He held himself up, clutching onto the door frame, as he cast his gaze over all the other skeletons stored in the room.

Something possessive and starving inside of him refused to part ways with the remains of the people he'd resurrected. He'd tried to bury them again, place them back where he'd found them, but then an *itch* began to crawl along his skin, a compulsion that forced him to bring them back into the house and hide them away in the Bone Room.

His latest addition was number twenty-two.

Twenty two souls, all resurrected. Twenty-two failures to end his life and give his soul to the Ritual that should have claimed him three years ago.

Twenty-two souls that had all pleaded to be sent back into the abyss.

Will closed the door, and somehow made it back to his bedroom before collapsing on the dirty, blood stained sheets on his mattress.

When he rose in the morning, the wound on his arm had stopped oozing pus, the foul smell of infection clearing. It was still raw and tender, and his magic still pulsed in waves of black spiderwebs in the surrounding veins, but his fever had receded and he was able to stomach a small breakfast. He showered, letting the sluice of blood and ash and mud wash from his too-thin, malnourished body.

When he managed to make it downstairs on weak, wobbling legs with his bed sheets in his arms, intending to do his first load of laundry in god knows how long, he halted in his tracks.

The front door was wide open, and laid out in perfect formation on his porch was a complete skeleton.

It happened again. And again. And again.

Bones appearing on his front porch every morning, not a far cry from when Miguel brought home dead rats and birds and laid them at Will's feet in offering - like a gift. He stowed them all away in the Bone Room after performing a cleansing ritual on them, wary of potential curses or hexes upon the bones. He was starting to run out of room for them, and resorted to burying them along the banks of the Mississippi in the dark of night, the moon his only witness as he shovelled soft clay and mud aside to dig new graves.

Finally having had enough, he sat on sentry duty one night, wrapped in his coat on the porch and watched the dark perimeter of the house like a hawk.

Despite his best efforts, he fell asleep, and awoke to six rib bones laid out at his feet. He tried again, keeping himself awake all night, determined he would catch whoever, or whatever, was doing this. The night passed with no disturbance, not even a flicker of unease from his magic alerting him to anything untoward. When the sun rose and birds began to sing, Will fought his tired eyes and forced himself to stay awake until noon, just in case. When he went back inside the house, relief seeping through his frazzled nerves, he nearly screamed at the sight of the gleaming ivory skull set upon his freshly made bed.

And then, he remembered; he hadn't closed the circle after his last Ritual of Lazarus.

New Orleans - Present Day

"Alright," Jack began with a heavy sigh, gesturing to the board he stood in front of in the cramped office. "Let's break this down properly. Questions at the end, please."

He cleared his throat, then tapped his left index finger on the photograph of Francesca's house pinned to the board. "Will is going to create his scene for our killer at Francesca's residence, which thankfully we've had clearance for. Myself, Hannibal and some officers will escort him in two nights' time to her address so he can set up. We're going in and out, no fuss or wasting time."

His small audience nodded.

"Once Will is finished, we'll send our anonymous tip offs to Freddie Lounds and a few local news outlets, and the media can do the rest. I'm counting on Miss Lounds' aptitude for getting into places she's not meant to be to get plenty of photographs of the scene Will is going to create."

"And if she doesn't?" Zeller asked dryly.

"Then she can use the images we'll include in our message to her," Jack answered firmly, pointing back to the board again.

"Once the message is out, it gives us a week for our killer to hear about it before the meeting Will has requested with him," Jack continued.

"The message states the date, time and coordinates, before you ask," Will cut in as he watched Jimmy and Zeller open their mouths.

"Midnight at the abandoned plantation," Jack reaffirmed, gesturing to the photograph of said building. "It has plenty of vantage points for the squad I've commissioned, and it's overgrown enough that we can make ourselves hidden so our killer doesn't spot us. It's away from the public eye, too."

"Our killer will meet Will inside the house. Jack's team will be on standby if they're needed, but Will is capable of securing the killer until officers can come in and arrest him," Hannibal supplied, glancing at Will as he spoke.

"And let's say our killer is a witch more powerful than Will - that they could take Will out with a flick of the wrist, turn our bullets into dust before someone can get a round in him. What then?" Beverly asked, frowning. "I don't like the thought of Will alone in this building with a suspect we know nothing about."

"His magic won't be a problem," Will reassured her. "I promise."

"You're not a trained officer or agent, Will, how do you know that?" Beverly asked, worry etching across her face.

"Whatever he is capable of, I can stop him," Will insisted. "My magic can do more than conjure spirits."

"We've all seen you do the impossible - no one is forgetting what you did when you brought yourself back to life in the lab," Beverly rebuked gently. "But this witch, whoever he is, has

conjured a demon that's wreaking havoc on our lives. He's murdered five victims in cold blood in his pursuit of summoning evil. He's *unhinged* - we can't be sure this is safe."

Her tone reminded Will of the way an officer would speak to a man poised on the edge of a bridge ready to jump - was that how she saw him?

"All valid points," Hannibal smoothly interjected. "However, without meaning to sound condescending Beverly, the combined knowledge Will and I have of magic leads us to believe that this killer is a fledgling witch. Unstable and violent, yes, but nowhere near as powerful or knowledgeable in their witchcraft. The circles and runes he's fumbled his way through creating are unpractised, naïve. I have reason to believe his summoning of Belial was a fluke."

"That's the first time you've mentioned that," Jack said sharply, head whipping towards Hannibal's direction. "Have you developed more of a profile on the killer?"

Hannibal reached for one of the files laid out on the table they all sat round, opening it and sliding out a couple of the glossy, A4 photographs of the crime scenes.

"This symbol," Hannibal began, pointing to the bloody symbol painted onto the ground in the photograph, "from his third attempt at summoning. It makes no sense. It's the first time he used the Leviathan cross, a symbol I've come across many times when studying black magic and attempts to summon the Devil. But this? This here next to it is the *Sigillum Deis* - the Seal of God. It immediately cancels out anything he could have hoped to have achieved by using the Leviathan cross."

Jack took the photo, studying the wobbly symbols and sigils painted onto the floor in the blood of the victim. The third murder had been an elderly woman of eighty-nine named Constance Smith, a great-grandmother of six and a retired nurse.

Will still cringed at the sight of her slit neck.

"So he used a Satanic symbol and then cancelled it out immediately by using this Seal of God?" Jack asked. "Why would he do that?"

"Because he had no idea what he was doing," Will sighed, frustrated. "He was clueless at this point in his attempts. He was throwing anything and everything at these evocations, spilling all that blood for *nothing* ."

"What did you see in the Netherworld?" Jimmy asked quietly, looking a little pale. "You accessed Francesca's memories, didn't you? You were able to experience her murder first hand?"

Will nodded. "He was talking about how he'd been attempting to summon the Devil, which is obvious from the litany of Sigils of Lucifer he was using. As Hannibal said though, his witchcraft was naïve, nonsensical. I know it may look like a bunch of jumbled up shapes and squiggles to you guys, but getting the symbols, the ritual, right is *everything* . It's no different to chemical equations in that sense - if the symbols aren't right, if the process isn't right, the magic won't work. There's nothing to channel your magic through, no route for it to follow."

“So what went right for him, in the end?” Jimmy queried, rubbing at his brow. “All his other attempts were botched. How come he finally figured out how to summon Belial successfully?”

“When I was… with Francesca,” Will started hesitantly, “in her memory of her murder, the killer said he’d been doing this ‘work’ for years. He spent years trying to summon Lucifer without blood offerings after multiple failed rituals. Major demonic entities need a blood offering in order to be evoked properly, which is why he was killing so rapidly once he realised this, one a month. He said Belial had called to him, like it was some sort of divine purpose he’d suddenly had clarity over.”

“He switched gears,” Bev commented, taking the photograph Hannibal offered her of Francesca’s murder. “Abandoned his attempts to summon the Devil and went for the next best thing - Belial. There’s no evidence to suggest he knew he needed to draw the evocation circle *first* when he murdered Francesca - or, well, carve it into her body.”

“Which is exactly why I’m not worried about any threat he may pose to Will,” Hannibal responded. “He spent years unsuccessfully trying to summon Lucifer, then in a desperate escalation, started killing as part of his summoning attempts. The fact he managed to evoke Belial is pure luck - I am convinced of it. He carved the circle into her, with the Sigil of Belial, then slit her throat. Belial appeared in those few seconds left Francesca had to live before she bled out.”

“All of that points to an absolute novice,” Will added. “Everything he’s done, the years he’s been striving towards his goal - he’s on his own. He has no other witches to consult, no one who was able to point him in the right direction. He clearly has no Coven and is stumbling around in the dark trying to navigate his magic, weak as it is. It all points towards it being mere coincidence that he was able to summon Belial.”

“Sounding a little empathetic there, Will,” Zeller sniped under his breath. “Maybe you two could be buddies.”

“I’m stating facts,” Will spat at him, no patience left for Zeller’s attitude. “He *is* lonely - no one fucking tries to summon the Devil if they’re not desperate, at rock bottom. No one would do all of this if they had healthy, stable connections in their life. If they were loved.”

“Plenty of people have shit lives,” Zeller scoffed. “Doesn’t mean they go looking for evil and sacrificing innocents in the process.”

“I’m not making excuses for what he’s done,” Will disagreed, shaking his head. “But you have *no* idea what it does to someone when they have magic and no one to help them with that - it can drive you insane.”

“That what happened with you?” Zeller carried on, eyes alight with disgust.

“That’s enough,” Jack barked, glaring at Zeller. “Watch your mouth, Brian.”

“In fact - how do we know Will isn’t more than a little sympathetic to this killer?” Zeller argued, leaning forwards. “How do we know *anything* about this son of a bitch? How do any

of you know that these damn talismans he's got us wearing aren't cursed?"

Will burst out laughing in disbelief. "Seriously? You're trying to pit everyone against me now?"

"I'm trying to highlight the fact it's just *so* convenient you know about all of this," Zeller hissed. "That you just happen to know the killer is lonely. That you just happen to be able to access a dead woman's memories in some astral fucking plane nobody but you can access. It's starting to smell like bullshit, witch."

The lights overhead flickered, the electricity crackling throughout the office. The barest whisper of darkness was beginning to creep into the corner of Will's eyes, and the air seemed to *throb* with wicked energy.

"Take five Zeller," Jack ordered, glancing nervously at Will. "We're not getting anywhere bitching at each other like this, and you're starting to sound paranoid. Will is our greatest asset to this case."

"He shouldn't even be on this case," Zeller protested, standing and slamming his hands down on the table. "I'm sick of you kissing the ground he walks on just because he has a few cheap parlour tricks stuffed up his sleeve! We're no closer to catching this killer and I can't be the only one that thinks he's leading us round in circles, pulling the wool over our eyes!"

"Are you suggesting Will is involved in all of this?" Jimmy asked in disbelief. "Don't be ridiculous!"

"You've got them all fooled, but not me," Zeller spat, leaning forwards and staring directly at Will with contempt. "I see through all the smoke and mirrors shit you've got going on here. Safest place to hide is in plain sight, right, witch?"

"I'm sorry," Will stated flatly. "But this has gone on long enough."

"What - "

Before any of them could move a muscle, Will was up in a flash on the other side of the table and Zeller was crying out in pain. Will stalked towards him, right hand raised and tendons straining against his inked skin as he curled his fingers into a claw and spat a curse roughly under his breath in the Old Tongue. Zeller raised from the floor slightly, frozen in the position he had been in as he'd tried to back away from Will.

His limbs were immobile, locked in place. He couldn't move anything except for his eyes, which were darting around frantically and bulging in their sockets, blood vessels beginning to burst. His face was turning a horrific shade of red, veins popping in his forehead and neck as if the air was being squeezed out of him.

Jack leapt to his feet, but without even looking, Will sent a blast of his magic towards him with his left hand - Jack was pinned and restrained in less than a second, shouting in surprise. He struggled against the invisible binds of Will's magic, and Hannibal watched in quietly concealed awe as Will's eyes gave way to the darkness, ink black seeping across his sclera.

Zeller was choking, rendered completely helpless and immobile.

“Will, stop!” Jimmy cried, starting to get up.

A lash of transparent magic from the witch had Jimmy bound to his chair like Jack in the blink of an eye.

“Reach for that gun and I’ll squeeze him so hard his eyes pop out, Bev,” Will murmured ever so gently, not looking away from Zeller and yet knowing exactly what Bev was doing behind his back.

“Let him go!” Jack seethed. “Be fucking professional about this, Will, for God’s sake! You’re only going to make this worse!”

“Worse?” Will asked, smiling, still fixed on Zeller’s purpling face. “Brian has been desperate for me to do this, for so long. Why else would he so foolishly antagonise me like this if he didn’t want a reaction?”

A tiny, breathless noise escaped from Zeller’s spit flecked lips.

“Oh? You trying to say something?” Will cooed darkly. “That’s a shame. You can’t talk, can you? For fucking once.”

“Will,” Bev pleaded. “It’s alright, just let him go. We can talk about this, work through it like adults. Brian is in the wrong, we all know that, but you’re going to make yourself the bad guy in this if you don’t stop this.”

“Tssk,” Will dismissed her softly, the light shining off of his blackened eyes. “That’s what everyone wants, isn’t it? For me to be the bad guy.”

“Hannibal, do something,” Jack gritted out, uselessly trying to wriggle against the iron grip of Will’s power pinning him to his chair.

“What, our dear professor?” Will laughed dryly. “You think he cares? No, he finds my magic *incredible* , Jack, didn’t you know?”

“Will,” Hannibal said lowly. “You’re angry. I know you are, rightly so - but you should listen to them. Let Zeller go.”

“So he can just continue to discriminate against me?” Will rebuked, his voice shaking with rage. “I’m tired of hearing it.”

Jack grimaced as he watched Will lean forwards and drag his tongue along the sweat dripping along the column of Zeller’s throat, the veins bulging as if he was being strangled by invisible hands.

“How does it feel to be held on the precipice by the person you detest so much? I can taste your Death, Brian,” Will whispered, grinning. “And it tastes like *shit* .”

Abruptly, over as quickly as it had happened, Will released the forensic investigator and the rest of the team. The electricity cut out with a loud *pop* , descending the room into darkness under the witch's wrath, and then Will vanished.

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